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

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Acronyms

AMTO	Assisted Medical Treatment Orders
BEAM	Basic Education Assistance Module
CBT	Cash-based transfer
CSP	Country strategic plan
EPRI	Economic Policy Research Institute
FDM	Food Deficit Mitigation
GDP	Gross domestic product
HSCT	Harmonized Social Cash Transfer
MPSLSW	Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare
NSPPF	National Social Protection Policy Framework
NSSA	National Social Security Authority
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
ZimVAC	Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee



1. Introduction

This case study explores the World Food Programme's (WFP) role in supporting social protection in Zimbabwe over the last decade. It assesses how WFP has supported the building blocks of Zimbabwe's national social protection system, focusing on non-contributory social assistance as the government's main mechanism for supporting poor and vulnerable people. This is a light-touch exercise, undertaken through a rapid literature review and interviews with WFP staff.

2. Context

Country Context

Zimbabwe is a lower-income country and has a population of 15.2 million according to the 2022 census (ZIMSTAT, 2022), with a high proportion of youth. Data from the 2012 census found that two thirds of Zimbabwe's population lived in rural areas and that 52 percent of the population were female. Around nine percent of the population were living with at least one disability (UN Zimbabwe Country Team, 2021: 1).

In the first decade since 1980, the country had made great progress with significant improvements in social well-being. However, recent decades have brought a more varied picture suffering from several economic and environmental shocks that have contributed to high food insecurity and malnutrition (UN Zimbabwe Country Team, 2021: viii). As estimated 24 percent of children aged between 6 and 59 months are chronically malnourished. The proportion of children under 5 years experiencing stunting increased to 29.4 percent in 2020, compared with 23.5 percent in 2019 and 27 percent in 2015 (WFP, 2022d: 4). Results are more positive in terms of rates of wasting and obesity among children under 5 years (2.9 percent and 2.5 percent respectively). At the same time, the prevalence of anaemia among women and girls of reproductive age is considerable (28.8 percent) and the exclusive

breastfeeding rate for infants aged 0–5 months is low (41.9 percent). HIV prevalence remains high at 11.9 percent (WFP, 2022d: 4–5). Zimbabwe is also host to 22,000 refugees and asylum seekers from southern and eastern Africa (WFP, 2021b: 8).

Zimbabwe's economic performance over the last two decades has been volatile, characterized by booms and recessions (Sharma et al., 2022: 10). As a result of numerous stressors, such as climate change, protracted economic instability and external pressures, at least 49 percent of its population live in extreme poverty, which is an increase from 23 percent in 2011 (WFP, 2022c; 2022d). Women, girls and urban households account for a disproportionately high share of people in poverty (WFP, 2022d: 3). The country's limited fiscal space impedes allocations to the social sector, including for social protection (WFP, 2022d: 3). Zimbabwe also has large external arrears to international finance institutions, which continues to be a drag on its growth potential as it limits investment (Sharma et al., 2022: 12).

According to a study by the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) and WFP (2021: 14), Zimbabwe has two distinct categories of vulnerability: (i) groups that are chronically vulnerable (e.g. older people, child-headed families, people with disabilities); and (ii) groups that are acutely vulnerable (e.g. working households who are vulnerable due

to shocks). With rapid onset of shocks and a lack of risk management practices, acutely vulnerable groups are also increasingly relying on government assistance to bounce back from shocks, putting additional pressure on already constrained public resources. “Thus, without an opportunity for recovery, a higher number of households are experiencing structural risk, i.e., deprivation and other challenges even in the absence of shocks” (EPRI and WFP, 2021: 14). As a result, each successive shock increases the number of vulnerable households, with even minor shocks progressively putting more households at risk over time.

According to the 2023 Global Hunger Index, Zimbabwe ranks 107th out of 125 countries and faces a “serious” hunger situation (GHI, 2023). Various factors contribute to this persistent food insecurity, including widespread poverty, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, limited employment opportunities, and economic instability, exacerbated by liquidity challenges and recurrent climate-induced shocks (WFP, n.d.). Recent

studies further link food insecurity to erratic rainfall, which led to reduced crop production in 2022, along with the ongoing effects of high inflation (WFP, 2022c).

The 2022 Rural Livelihoods Assessment by the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) estimates that at the start of the lean season (October to December 2022), about 30 percent of the rural population was food insecure. This number was expected to rise to 38 percent (3.8 million people) during the peak of the lean season (January to March 2023) (FNC, 2022: 180; WFP, 2022c). Additionally, the ZimVAC Urban Livelihoods Assessment for 2020 highlights the vulnerability of urban populations to food insecurity, worsened by COVID-19, poor past agricultural seasons, and Zimbabwe’s challenging macroeconomic environment (FNC, 2020: 9). In 2020, 42 percent of the urban population faced cereal insecurity, up from 30 percent in 2019, leaving approximately 2.4 million urban residents food insecure in 2020, compared to 2.2 million in 2019 (FNC, 2020: 163, 168).



Social protection context

Zimbabwe's social protection system primarily consists of non-contributory social assistance programs. However, it is highly fragmented, with multiple small programs that offer limited coverage and lack cohesive governance. Together, these programs cover less than 50 percent of the food-insecure population living in poverty (Sharma et al., 2022: 103). Table 1 outlines the key social protection programs in Zimbabwe. Addressing the needs of the urban poor and including informal workers in these programs remain significant challenges (Devereux and Cuesta, 2021).

A large portion of social support is funnelled through donor-funded humanitarian programs implemented by the United Nations and NGOs. In 2017, an estimated 19 percent of the population received support through these channels, while 16 percent benefited from government-implemented social assistance programs (Sharma et al., 2022: 107). By 2019, the proportion of the population receiving support from at least one government-implemented program rose to 37 percent (UNICEF, 2021: 5).

Table 1. Selected government-implemented social assistance schemes in Zimbabwe

Scheme name	Type	Target group
Harmonized Social Cash Transfer (HSCT)	Unconditional cash transfer programme	Labour-constrained and food-poor households
Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM)	Educational subsidy aimed at increasing school attendance and completion rates of at-risk children	Vulnerable children aged between 6 and 19 years in primary and secondary schools
Food Deficit Mitigation (FDM)	Food transfer programme, delivering maize grain to households during the peak lean season (October – March)	Labour-constrained households
Assisted Medical Treatment Orders (AMTO)	Health subsidy aimed at improving access to healthcare for the poor and vulnerable	Poor and vulnerable; on-demand programme so potential beneficiaries must apply for benefits, and eligibility criteria are vague
Social insurance schemes	Schemes are managed by the National Social Security Authority (NSSA) and primarily constitute private and public sector pension schemes	Mostly aimed at formal workers, despite Zimbabwe having one of the world's largest informal economies

Source: Sharma et al., 2022: 104–106.

A recent World Bank report highlights that Zimbabwe's social assistance programs are generally progressive, with benefits concentrated in the poorest households (Sharma et al., 2022: 112). However, these programs suffer from low coverage, inadequate benefits, and poor targeting, which limits their effectiveness in addressing poverty and inequality (World Bank, 2021: 103; WFP, 2022d: 4). The country's social protection infrastructure and delivery systems are insufficient, and the government's emergency response capacity remains weak (EPRI and WFP, 2021: 55). Additionally, Zimbabwe's social protection system is ill-equipped to respond to shocks, as evidenced by its inability to scale up during the COVID-19 pandemic to reach the most vulnerable households (Sharma et al., 2022: 127).

Zimbabwe's National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF), approved by the Cabinet in 2016, is built on five pillars: (i) social assistance; (ii) social insurance; (iii) labour market interventions; (iv) livelihood support; and (v) social support and care (MPSLSW, 2016). However, due to ongoing economic and social instability, along with frequent disasters and shocks, investments in resilience-building measures have been limited (EPRI and WFP, 2021: 55). The development of the NSPPF was a prolonged and complex process that began in 2009, marked by inter-ministerial coordination challenges and the involvement of multiple external agencies and donors.

To try to improve coherence among frameworks, policy cycles and implementation systems, the Government of Zimbabwe has developed the National Development Strategy Phase 1 (2021–2025) to implement its Vision 2030 and has also adopted a medium- and short-term monitoring and evaluation framework (Chamba and Wailesi, 2021: 3; WFP, 2022d: 5). There are also ongoing national reforms and a devolution policy (Chamba and Wailesi, 2021: 3). Responsibility for social protection in Zimbabwe cuts across several sectors. It is led by the Ministry of Public Service,

Labour and Social Welfare (MPSLSW), which collaborates with the Office of the President, the Ministry of Health and Child Care, Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water, Climate and Rural Development, Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community, Small and Medium Enterprises Development, among others (Chamba and Wailesi, 2021: 3; Kapingidza, 2022: 9). Key donors working in strengthening the national social protection system in Zimbabwe include the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Bank, International Labour Organization and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Chamba and Wailesi, 2021: 3).

Zimbabwe's social protection system faces significant financial and capacity constraints, limiting its ability to support the growing number of people living in extreme poverty. In 2020, an estimated 7.9 million people were living below the food poverty line (World Bank, 2021: xii). The country's social protection budget, averaging 0.4 percent of GDP from 2019 to 2021, is far below the sub-Saharan Africa regional average of 1.5 percent of GDP (UNICEF, 2021: 6). As a share of the national budget, the non-contributory social protection allocation increased from 0.4 percent in 2017–2018 to 2 percent between 2019 and 2021 (UNICEF, 2021: 5). Nevertheless, Zimbabwe spends 3.5 percent of its GDP on both contributory and non-contributory social protection programmes, less than the sub-Saharan Africa average of 4.5 percent (UNICEF, 2021: 5). Institutionally, the MPSLSW receives most of the social protection budget (UNICEF, 2021: 3). However, high inflation in 2019 and 2020 significantly reduced funding for health, education, and social services compared to 2018 (World Bank, 2021: 30). Additionally, there are concerns about Zimbabwe's growing reliance on donor funding for social programmes, which limits the programmes' scope, sustainability, and the government's flexibility in addressing rising social protection needs (World Bank, 2021: 35).

3. WFP's objectives and role

Since its establishment in Zimbabwe in 1980, the World Food Programme (WFP) has transitioned from focusing solely on immediate humanitarian needs to enhancing long-term resilience to food insecurity and livelihood vulnerability. Over the last decade, this shift has involved a greater emphasis on Food Assistance for Assets¹ programmes, improved partnerships, and better coordination with the national social protection system (WFP, 2022b: iv). In 2021, WFP reduced its humanitarian operations—initially scaled up after Cyclone Idai in 2019 and during several drought years—following Zimbabwe's highest cereal harvest in 20 years. This bumper harvest exceeded the national requirement and resulted in a decline in the number of food-insecure individuals (WFP, 2021b: 7). As one interviewee pointed out, Zimbabwe is primarily a development context with strong humanitarian elements, requiring a balance between emergency responses and long-term system strengthening.

WFP's previous Zimbabwe Country Strategic Plan (CSP) was initially set to run from 2017 to 2021 but was extended to July 2022. The plan emphasized WFP's increased focus on building long-term resilience to food insecurity and supporting longer-term national social protection. It included six strategic outcomes: (i) crisis response; (ii) nutrition; (iii) livelihoods; (iv) resilience; (v) social protection; and (vi) supply chains (WFP, 2022a; 2022b). Activities related to social protection spanned various strategic outcomes. For instance, under strategic outcome 1, WFP provided food assistance to seasonally food-insecure Zimbabweans and refugees, complementing the Government's FDM strategy and the HSCT programme, both embedded in the NSPPF. Strategic outcome 5 aimed to enhance the national social protection system through improved analytics, institutional capacity strengthening, and innovative climate risk management activities (WFP, 2021b: 3). Despite these efforts, the CSP 2017–2021 faced underfunding. Annual reports for 2017,

¹ The World Food Programme (WFP)'s Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) initiative addresses immediate food needs through cash, voucher or food transfers, while at the same time it promotes the **building or rehabilitation of assets that will improve long-term food security and resilience**.



2018, and 2021 indicated that, while donors supported WFP’s emergency work, activities focused on resilience strengthening and social protection were largely underfunded (WFP, 2018: 9; 2017a; 2021b). As a result, WFP was unable to fully implement activities designed to build government and community capacity for effectively preparing for and responding to shock-induced emergencies.

In July 2022, WFP launched its new Country Strategic Plan (CSP) 2022–2026 for Zimbabwe. This plan outlines WFP’s strategy to solidify its role as a key player in advancing shock-responsive social protection and sustainable, resilient

food systems. It builds on lessons learned from the previous CSP’s implementation and evaluation, as well as feedback from stakeholder consultations, and aligns with the priorities of the Government of Zimbabwe (WFP, 2022d: 2). The new CSP identifies five strategic outcomes and associated activities, detailed in Table 2, with each outcome linked to a relevant Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and WFP’s corporate strategy. Furthermore, the strategic outcomes related to social protection are connected to the key components of a national social protection system, as outlined in WFP’s Strategy for Support to Social Protection (WFP, 2021a).

Table 2: WFP Zimbabwe’s Contributions to the Building Blocks

Building blocks of Zimbabwe’s social protection system		WFP Zimbabwe’s Activities
SYSTEM ARCHITECTURE	 Governance, capacity and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social protection governance • Technical and coordination assistance
	 Platforms and infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food security and nutrition support to national institutions • Urban and peri-urban livelihoods support • Agricultural supply chain services and food systems support • Cash and food transfers to rural communities • Anticipatory and shock-responsive social protection mechanisms and emergency preparedness support
PROGRAMME FEATURES	 Benefit delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unconditional humanitarian cash and food transfers (rural and urban) • Insurance • On-demand humanitarian logistics and common services • Supply chain services

Source: Author’s own based on WFP, 2022d; 2021a.

With the CSP 2022–2026, WFP has synchronized its planning process with the new government planning cycles (WFP, 2021b: 3). This plan includes strategic outcomes focused on both targeting social protection through food and cash-based assistance (under strategic outcome 1) and enhancing national and subnational institutions for anticipatory and shock-responsive social protection (under strategic outcome 4).

Additionally, it integrates with the disaster risk management portfolio and WFP’s emergency preparedness and response efforts (WFP, 2022d: 15; key informant interview). The objective of CSP 2022–2026 is to enable Zimbabwe to better absorb stresses and shocks by increasing resilience and strengthening response capacities within the government and other domestic actors (WFP, 2022d: 11).

4. Activities

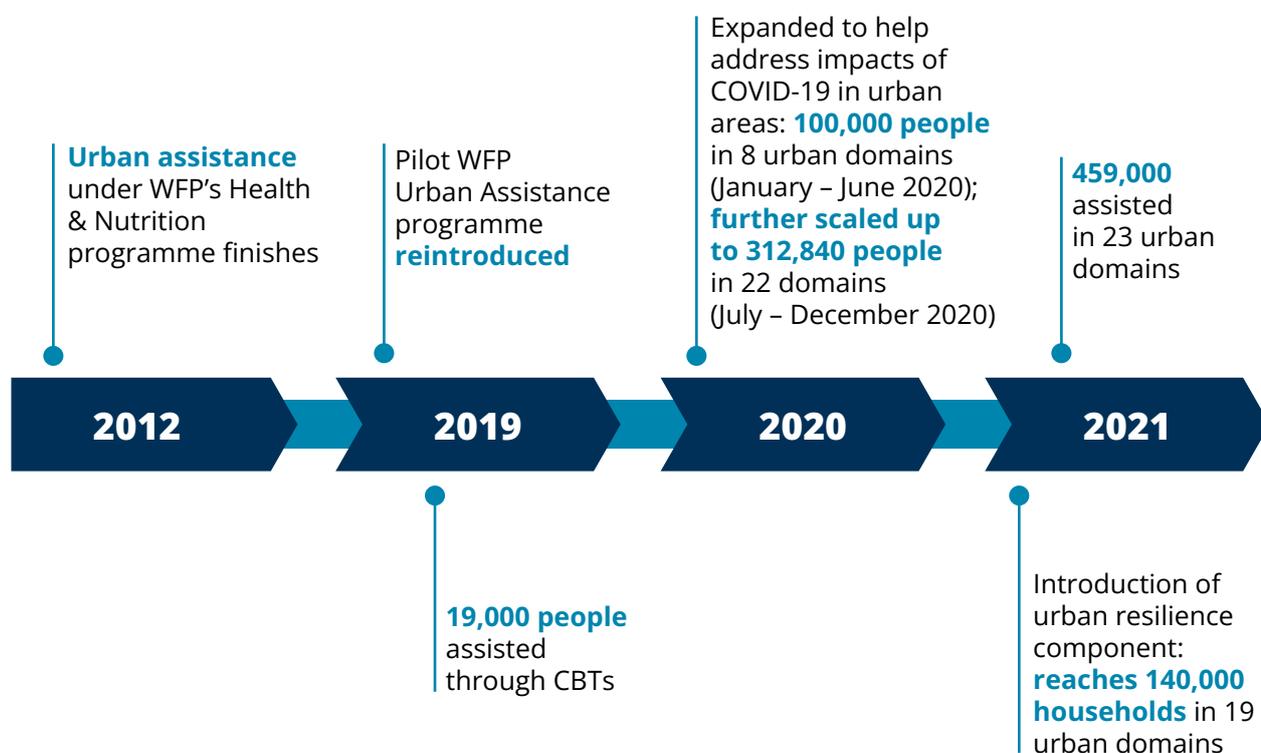
This review focuses on the Urban Social Assistance and Resilience Building programme as a priority intervention area for strengthening social protection in Zimbabwe.

Urban Social Assistance and Resilience Building programme

The Urban Social Assistance and Resilience Building programme is designed to support food-insecure urban populations by providing food assistance and enhancing their resilience to shocks (WFP, 2021b: 14). Figure 1 outlines the

timeline for the programme's reintroduction. Initially piloted in 2019, the programme aimed to support 19,000 individuals through cash-based transfers (CBTs) in response to deteriorating economic conditions affecting food security and poverty in both urban and rural areas (WFP, 2019: 3). This marked a reintroduction of WFP's urban assistance, which had been paused since 2012 (WFP, 2019: 6). In 2020, the programme was expanded with donor support to meet increased needs due to COVID-19 in urban areas (WFP, 2020: 3). By 2021, the programme assisted 459,000 people across 23 urban domains. While the initial target was to consistently reach 326,000 people each month, this number fluctuated throughout the year due to funding challenges and a retargeting exercise (WFP, 2021b: 14).

Figure 1: Timeline of the reintroduction of the Urban Social Assistance and Resilience Building programme in Zimbabwe by WFP



Source: Developed from WFP, 2019; 2020; 2021b; key informant interview.

Following the government's restrictions on mobile money platforms in June 2020, WFP sought alternative methods for disbursing CBTs. To reduce reliance on a single modality, CBTs are now provided through e-vouchers or a remittance-based company (WFP, 2020; 2021b: 14). Additionally, in June 2020, the Minimum Expenditure Basket and transfer value were increased from US\$ 9 to US\$ 12 per person per month to address rising food price inflation.

In 2021, WFP further enhanced its programme by integrating an urban resilience component to support food-insecure urban populations struggling with economic challenges and livelihood losses due to COVID-19. This resilience-building component focuses on climate-smart urban agricultural solutions and livelihoods

promotion for informal workers among the urban poor (Sharma et al., 2022: 108). Projects include hydroponics, mushroom production, poultry farming, and value addition for both food and non-food value chains in and around cities. The component also aims to empower communities by providing tools to generate income and improve their ability to cope with shocks (WFP, 2021b: 14). Complementary skills-building initiatives, such as financial literacy, vocational and digital skills training, marketing, and micro business management, were also implemented (WFP, 2021b: 14). WFP also initiated a joint effort with the MPSLSW and UNICEF to harmonize the targeting of social assistance programmes in urban areas (WFP, 2021b: 14).



5. Results

The Urban Social Assistance and Resilience Building programme yielded some positive results. According to WFP (2020: 14):

Post-distribution monitoring (PDM) in 2020 showed improvements across all food security indicators, which can largely be attributed to the social assistance programme. The proportion of households with acceptable food consumption increased significantly from 45.1 percent at baseline (January 2020) to 74.1 percent in September 2020, while the CSI [coping strategy index] of assisted households decreased from 16.27 at baseline (January) to 15.3 in September, indicating a significant improvement in food security.

The programme also enhanced access to food among women of reproductive age (15–49 years), with a percentage increase being observed from 12.6 percent at baseline to 48.6 percent in September 2020 (WFP, 2020:14). Complementary programming in 2020, such as the provision of nutrition and protection education, coupled with livelihood training sessions, improving beneficiary financial awareness, internal savings and lending, also contributed to the programme's success (WFP, 2020: 14). The 2020 evaluation of the CSP 2017–2021 also highlighted improvements in the management of food assistance, notably the inclusion of urban beneficiaries by WFP (WFP, 2022d: 7). In response to clear evidence that the macroeconomic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic had severely impacted the urban poor, the inclusion of an urban food assistance component emerged as a key adaptation and achievement of the 2017–2021 CSP. Multiple stakeholders highlighted this shift, noting the country office's ability to respond swiftly and effectively to evolving needs (WFP, 2022a: viii).

These positive results continued in 2021. CBTs, coupled with nutrition advocacy, enabled households to transition from limited diets to high-value and nutritious diets, through increased purchasing power (WFP, 2021b: 14). According to WFP (2021b: 14):

Progress was observed across food security indicators from baseline, evidenced by the sustained increase in the proportion of households with acceptable food consumption scores, and the reduction in the coping strategy index. The number of women with a minimum dietary diversity reduced, showing poor access to a variety of food as monitoring findings show that women often limit their own food consumption to ensure other household members have adequate food.

In May and June 2021, WFP conducted its first urban retargeting exercise across eight domains that had been receiving CBT assistance since January 2020. 58 percent of those assisted continued to meet the selection criteria, while 42 percent no longer met the inclusion criteria, and were discontinued from the programme allowing new beneficiaries to be registered (WFP, 2021b: 14).

The rapid urban programme scale-up in the context of COVID-19 experienced teething issues in 2020, particularly while introducing new transfer modalities. Key challenges around disbursement included “cash liquidity issues with Western Union, crowding in certain domains due to the limited number of contracted retail outlets, and lack of face-to-face beneficiary engagement hindering information flow” (WFP, 2020: 14).

6. Lessons Learned

WFP's active involvement in Zimbabwe, especially through the Urban Social Assistance and Resilience Building initiative, demonstrates the potential benefits of integrating food aid with skills development and resilience building. As Zimbabwe aligns its efforts with WFP's CSP 2022–2026, there is a promising opportunity to enhance social protection, improve livelihoods, and secure a better future for vulnerable groups. Achieving this will require a shift in mindset, a deeper understanding of the political environment, and increased collaboration between the government, external organizations, UN counterparts, and key stakeholders to effectively address Zimbabwe's complex challenges. Some of the key lessons are described below.

THE NEED FOR A MINDSET SHIFT AND RECOGNITION OF WFP'S ADDED VALUE

WFP is working on developing internal capacities and partnerships to meet its revised strategic outcomes, emphasizing the need for new skills and organizational competencies, particularly in social protection (WFP, 2022a: 66). The evaluation underscored WFP's strong comparative advantage in providing humanitarian assistance in Zimbabwe and its agility in adapting to changing conditions and scaling up emergency aid (WFP, 2022b: 17). However, it also identified opportunities to further develop WFP's comparative advantage in supporting national social protection systems (WFP, 2022a: 25). Challenges persist in balancing expertise in humanitarian response with excelling in the nexus between humanitarian aid and development. There is a need for improved learning and knowledge management processes (WFP, 2022a: 66) and stronger partnerships with the Government of Zimbabwe (KII). This includes

internal capacity building, sensitization around social protection, and more evidence-based advocacy and alignment (KII)

The shift from a delivery-focused role to an enabling role within WFP requires a significant change in mindset, recognizing that sustainable structural changes take time (KIIs; WFP, 2022a). This shift involves a willingness to experiment and consider radically different approaches that align with the operating constraints of national systems, rather than strictly adhering to WFP and donor standards (WFP, 2022a: 66). This approach is reflected in the CSP for 2022–2026 (WFP, 2022b). The new CSP outlines several programmes and strategies, particularly around shock-responsive social protection (SRSP), which is a key entry point for WFP (WFP, 2022a: 25).

WFP has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for an SRSP system in Zimbabwe through various programmes, evidence development, and advocacy efforts focused on anticipatory action, innovative risk management, and forecast-based financing (WFP, 2021b; Chamba and Wailesi, 2021). To achieve lasting impact, WFP employs a layering strategy that connects disaster risk finance, emergency preparedness and response, and social protection systems (WFP, 2021b: 3; 2022b). WFP Zimbabwe has also been addressing the humanitarian-development nexus by creating synergies between crisis response and resilience-building activities and piloting index-based insurance (WFP, 2022b: 7). Additionally, the successful inclusion of women in risk management and asset creation activities (WFP, 2022b: 7) and urban social assistance and resilience building (KII) are noted as successful interventions in the new CSP.

GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT IS REQUIRED TO SUPPORT A NATIONALLY OWNED SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM

A deep understanding of the political environment is essential for the effective design, formulation, and implementation of social protection programmes. To scale up programmes in Zimbabwe, overcoming existing barriers and competing priorities at the highest levels of government is crucial. Advocating with relevant government authorities to demonstrate the benefits of a well-financed, functional social protection system is one potential pathway to success (KII).

In the CSP 2017–2021, there were challenges in policy collaboration and alignment with national authorities on social protection (WFP, 2022a). These challenges were primarily due to differences in priorities among WFP, its resource partners, and the Government of Zimbabwe (WFP, 2022a: 18). Kapingidza (2022: 1) highlights that the development of the National Social Protection Policy Framework (NSPPF) involved complex negotiations among the government, external actors (including UN agencies), and within those external agencies, which impacted the extent of national ownership. To effectively advance Zimbabwe's social protection agenda, there is a need for enhanced advocacy and engagement to address these complexities and foster greater alignment.

ALIGNMENT IS KEY BUT TAKES TIME

Achieving social protection goals in Zimbabwe requires a greater alignment with government priorities and programmes (KIIs). This alignment needs to be integrated into every stage of the programme cycle, from inception to completion. Addressing questions related to better coordination and integration with existing government initiatives is crucial (KII). The need for improved government alignment was already

highlighted in the evaluation of WFP's Zimbabwe CSP 2017–2021 (WFP, 2022a: vii). The CSP 2022–2026 has committed to enhancing national and subnational ownership of humanitarian and resilience programmes and strengthening national systems and capacities (WFP, 2022b: 7). It aligns with the National Development Strategy Phase 1 (2021–2025) by directly supporting three of the fourteen national priorities: food security and nutrition, social protection, and natural resource management. Additionally, it is in harmony with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for 2022–2026.

While these initiatives are crucial, their development has involved considerable time and effort (KIIs). For example, the urban resilience pilot component of the Urban Social Assistance programme, which began about two years ago, has aligned well with government priorities. However, achieving this alignment required a sustained effort to understand and engage with government processes. This learning period has strengthened WFP's capacity to collaborate with other stakeholders and the government on urban resilience and advocacy (KII).

Effective alignment also hinges on enhanced organizational coordination within WFP and among UN agencies. Collaboration has notably improved with the formation of a coordination group that includes WFP, UNICEF, UNDP, the ILO, and the World Bank. However, partners have observed that there is still progress needed to develop a cohesive UN approach to social protection and to present a unified position in discussions with the government (WFP, 2022a: 25). The new CSP 2022–2026 recognizes the importance of “enhancing strategic and operational partnerships, including with other UN agencies, to increase the quality, reach, efficiency, and effectiveness of WFP activities” (WFP, 2022b: 7). This emphasis on improved coordination, particularly regarding SRSP and anticipatory action, was also reflected in KIIs.

EVIDENCE-BASED ADVOCACY PLAYS A CRITICAL ROLE IN ADVANCING THE AGENDA OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

For WFP to effectively transition to an enabling role, producing robust evidence and intensifying advocacy efforts is essential (KIIs). The 2020 evaluation of the CSP 2017–2021 highlights the need for compelling evidence to support advocacy on social protection practices. WFP is enhancing its advocacy efforts through its CSP and Social Protection Strategy, which provide credible frameworks for discussing issues and align WFP’s language with that of the government (KII).

WFP is increasingly involved in policy engagement and evidence generation in Zimbabwe (KII). This includes commissioning numerous assessments and analyses on various aspects of social protection over the years. For instance, WFP provided technical and financial support to the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) and Rural Livelihoods Assessments in 2019. A nationwide Urban Livelihoods and Food Security Assessment was also conducted in mid-2019 (WFP, 2019: 13), contributing valuable evidence for the Urban Social Assistance pilot. WFP’s ongoing support to the government, in

collaboration with the World Bank and UNICEF, to establish a central government-owned management information system for social protection programmes is another significant effort to enhance evidence generation (WFP, 2022a: 36; KII).

As WFP in Zimbabwe transitions to a more enabling role, focused on transferring skills and building capacities (WFP, 2022a: 66), there is a need to further refine the integration of advocacy and evidence generation activities, as well as to effectively utilize the impact evidence generated by WFP. Consideration should also be given to how WFP can better convey this information to the government (KII), including employing evidence-based approaches to assist civil servants in advocating within the government and the Office of the President for a harmonized social protection system that can also respond to shocks (KII). These considerations are connected to the ongoing mindset shift within WFP, as previously discussed (KII).



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