



WFP EVALUATION



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Evaluation of China WFP country strategic plan 2022–2025

Centralized evaluation report

**OEV/2024/002
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Key personnel for the evaluation

OFFICE OF EVALUATION

Anne-Claire Luzot	Director of Evaluation
Julia Betts	Deputy Director of Evaluation (centralized evaluations)
Alexandra Chambel	Senior Evaluation Officer
Philippa Morgan	Evaluation Officer, Evaluation Manager
Isabella De Cesaris	Evaluation Research Analyst

EXTERNAL EVALUATION TEAM

Joel Thorpe	Team Leader
Dr Kevin Chen	Senior Evaluator
Dr Shi Xinjie	National Evaluator
Kou Ke	Research Analyst
Erisa Pereira	Project Manager

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Executive Summary


Introduction

Evaluation features

1. The evaluation of the country strategic plan (CSP) for China for 2022–2025 was undertaken for accountability and learning purposes and to inform the design of the next CSP for China.
2. The evaluation covered the activities implemented by WFP under the CSP from November 2020 to September 2024. It was conducted between May and September 2024 using a theory-based, mixed-methods approach.
3. The main intended users of the evaluation are the WFP country office in China and technical divisions at headquarters in Rome, the WFP Executive Board, the Government of China, partner United Nations entities and donors. Other potential users include civil society and non-governmental organizations in China.
4. Consideration of equality between men and women, disability inclusion, protection, accountability to affected people, nutrition, climate change and environmental issues was integrated into the evaluation. Ethical standards were applied to safeguard the dignity of the people involved and the confidentiality of the information shared.

Context

5. With a population slightly above 1.4 billion people, China has the second largest economy in the world, and its economy is continuing to grow.¹ Since 1978, the country has changed from primarily agrarian society to one that is highly industrialized and urbanized. This transformation has elevated China from lower-middle income status in 2001 to upper-middle income status in 2010, when its per capita gross national income surpassed the World Bank threshold of USD 4,046.
6. Over the past 40 years, more than 800 million people in China have been lifted out of poverty, and extreme poverty was eradicated in 2020 (see table 1).² However, income disparities remain: it is estimated that in 2020, 24.7 percent of the population was living on less than USD 6.85 per day³, and poverty rates in rural areas were three times higher than those in urban areas.⁴

TABLE 1: POVERTY AND EXTREME POVERTY RATES IN CHINA (PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION) (2017–2020)				
	Poverty rate (latest data)		Extreme poverty rate (latest data)	
	2017	2020	2017	2020
 Total	32	24.7	0.7	0

Source: World Bank. 2020. Poverty headcount ratio at USD 2.15 per day (2017 purchasing power parity), poverty headcount ratio at USD 6.85 per day (2017 purchasing power parity).

¹ United Nations China. 2020. *United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the People's Republic of China 2021–2025*.

² *Ibid.*

³ World Bank. 2024. *The World Bank in China: Overview*.

⁴ United Nations Development Programme. 2023. *Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023 – Unstacking global poverty: data for high impact action. Briefing note for countries on the 2023 Multidimensional Poverty Index: China*.

7. Following the eradication of extreme poverty, national priorities have shifted towards rural revitalization. China's rural areas are largely composed of smallholder farmers who have low incomes, limited technology, weak market links and inadequate financial support. China's efforts have therefore focused on sustaining food security, preventing a return to poverty and improving rural infrastructure and governance.
8. As part of its rural revitalization and development strategy, China has made significant strides in reducing hunger in recent decades, developing a complex food system designed to feed its vast population and support exports. China's achievement of the 2015 Millennium Development Goal target – halving the proportion of its population suffering from hunger – accounted for nearly two thirds of the global reduction in hunger between 1990 and 2015.⁵
9. China has also made significant progress in reducing malnutrition, including achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets for ≤ 2.5 percent undernourishment in the total population, ≤ 5 percent stunting and ≤ 2 percent wasting in children under 5. Since 2013, stunting rates have dropped by more than 50 percent, although nutrition indicators remain worse in rural and impoverished areas.⁶
10. Despite significant achievements, nutrition challenges persist, including overweight, obesity and micronutrient deficiency. More than 34 percent (34.4 percent in urban and 34.2 percent in rural areas) of Chinese residents over 18 were overweight in 2020, and 16.4 percent (17.5 percent in urban and 15.3 percent in rural areas) were obese. Of children under 5, 8.0 percent of boys and 5.4 percent of girls were overweight in 2020 and 3.6 percent were obese (4.2 percent of boys and 2.7 percent of girls). Over half of rural residents' nutrient intake does not meet dietary standards, increasing their risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases. Chinese children also face zinc deficiency. In 2017, zinc deficiency among children was 9.6 percent nationally, but this rate exceeds 20 percent in certain regions such as Fujian and Zhejiang provinces. Over 80 percent of children aged 7–13 in Gansu Province had zinc intake below the estimated average requirement.⁷

WFP country strategic plan

11. The evaluation found that the CSP has provided a strategic framework for collaboration between WFP and China, focusing on both domestic initiatives and contributions to reduce hunger around the world.
12. *WFP programming in China.* Within China, activities under the CSP sought to improve the nutrition status of preschool children and address rural vulnerability in targeted areas. These interventions were also intended to strengthen the WFP–China partnership. Under the CSP, innovative approaches have been piloted with the support of the Chinese Government and the private sector, with the expectation that successful models will be scaled up and integrated into national programmes.
13. *Global contributions.* At the global level, the CSP aimed to generate insights and lessons from China-based pilots that can inform global efforts to reduce hunger and facilitate new fundraising from private and public institutions in China to support WFP programming in China and international programmes. The CSP was built on the assumption that the

⁵ International Food Policy Research Institute. 2024. *2024 Global Food Policy Report: Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Nutrition*; and “China country strategic plan (2017–2021)” (WFP/EB.1/2017/7/8/Rev.1).

⁶ International Food Policy Research Institute. 2024. *2024 Global Food Policy Report: Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Nutrition*; “China country strategic plan (2022–2025)” (WFP/EB.A/2022/8-A/1/Rev.1); and WFP. 2024. *China Annual Country Report 2023*.

⁷ “China country strategic plan (2022–2025)” (WFP/EB.A/2022/8-A/1/Rev.1); International Food Policy Research Institute. 2024. *2024 Global Food Policy Report: Food Systems for Healthy Diets and Nutrition*; National Health Commission of China. 2024. *Dietary guidelines for adult obesity (2024 edition)* (in Chinese); WFP. 2024. *China Annual Country Report 2023*; and WFP. 2023. *Endline report of zinc-enriched potatoes project in Gansu Province* (unpublished).

Government of China and the Chinese private sector would be willing to work with WFP to pilot new approaches, that the Government of China would fund the scale-up of successful pilots and consider their integration into national programmes and that the lessons from the CSP could be successfully applied to global efforts to improve nutrition and livelihoods.

14. *Strategic outcomes and activities.* The CSP has been implemented through one strategic outcome and three activities.
15. Activity 1, on value chains, aimed at improving incomes, production and climate resilience among smallholder farmers by piloting new crop varieties, aggregating farmers into cooperatives, supporting better connections to markets through certification and brand development, and piloting innovative approaches.
16. Activity 2, on preschool meal programmes, aimed at improving the nutrition status of children in underdeveloped rural areas by supporting the provision of nutritious preschool meals. WFP has supported six preschool meal pilots across four provinces: Gansu, Sichuan, Guangxi and Hunan. In line with WFP's country capacity strengthening modality, the projects have been implemented by local government project management offices, with WFP providing upstream support for inclusive design, vulnerability targeting, project monitoring and evidence generation to encourage scale-up through provincial and national programmes.
17. Activity 3 focused on building partnerships with the Government of China and the Chinese private sector to fund efforts to achieve zero hunger (in line with SDG 2) in China and around the world (table 2).

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF THE WFP CHINA COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2022-2025				
Focus area	Strategic plan outcome	Activities	Modality	Target group
Root causes	1: Left-behind groups in rural areas of China have improved nutrition status and livelihoods in line with national targets by 2025.	1: Value chains	Country capacity strengthening	Smallholder famers, especially women, older persons and people with disabilities in rural counties previously affected by poverty
		2: Preschool meal programmes	Country capacity strengthening	Children aged 3-5 in rural counties previously affected by poverty, especially left behind children*
		3: Facilitation of development and humanitarian cooperation	Global partnerships	Government and Chinese private sector

* The term "left-behind children" refers to children whose parents have moved to urban areas for work, often leaving them in the care of grandparents.

Source: Evaluation team.

18. In China, WFP works solely through country capacity strengthening. The aim of that work is to support local authorities in counties affected by poverty in promoting targeted innovative approaches that address gaps in livelihoods and nutrition in less socioeconomically developed rural areas. China has a strong enabling environment in place to address rural-urban inequality, including large-scale, well-funded national programmes and policies targeted at poverty alleviation and rural revitalization and strong institutional capacity at both the national and provincial levels. WFP has therefore focused its country capacity strengthening efforts on supporting programme design and the engagement of non-government actors.
19. WFP negotiates overall project design and the selection of partner provinces with the national Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. WFP then works with the Department of Rural Affairs in the selected provinces to identify counties suitable for project implementation, which is then undertaken through county-level implementation mechanisms, with WFP supporting project design, beneficiary selection and monitoring. This technical cooperation model ensures strong alignment between WFP and national and provincial priorities.
20. The CSP largely continued the strategic approach of the previous CSP for China, which covered 2017–2021. However, the CSP activities were reorganized, with all activities listed under one strategic outcome instead of five. WFP continued to support preschool meal programmes and value chains and to facilitate fundraising partnerships (with some change to activity numbers). However, support for South–South cooperation was continued outside the framework of the CSP and WFP dropped the objective of supporting disaster preparedness and response due to the high level of existing capacity and lack of government appetite for international support. In April 2020, WFP and the Government announced the establishment of a global humanitarian hub in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Like work on South–South cooperation, work under this hub is also undertaken outside the framework of the CSP. WFP increased its evidence generation under the new CSP and also commissioned many project evaluations following recommendations arising from a 2021 evaluation of the previous CSP.
21. The CSP for 2022–2025 began with a projected country portfolio budget of USD 15,652,925, and neither the CSP nor the budget was revised between July 2022 and September 2024. Work on preschool meal programmes (under activity 2) and value chains (under activity 1) were allocated the largest shares of the budget (45 percent and 42 percent, respectively) under the needs-based plan, with 13 percent for partnerships (under activity 3) (figure 1). As of 31 December 2023 the CSP implementation plan was 92 percent funded (table 3). Notably, WFP's work in China under the CSP has been fully funded by the Government of China and private donors (table 4). Funding is highly flexible, with less than 3 percent earmarked at the activity level.

Figure 1: Share of needs-based plan budget by activity, July 2022–December 2024



Source: Annual country reports for China for 2022 and 2023, data extracted on 17 June 2024.

TABLE 3: ALLOCATED RESOURCES AS A PERCENTAGE OF IMPLEMENTATION PLAN BY ACTIVITY, JULY 2022 TO DECEMBER 2024 (USD)				
Strategic outcome	Activity	Implementation plan	Allocated resources	Allocated resources as a percentage of implementation plan
1	1: Value chains	2 218 999	2 235 262	100.7
	2: Preschool meal programmes	2 625 076	2 708 992	103.2
	3: Partnerships	1 047 533	1 457 707	139.2
Total		5 891 608	6 401 960	108.7

Source: Cumulative financial overview as at 31 December 2024 (CN02), data extracted on 18 April 2025.

TABLE 4: DONOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHINA COUNTRY OFFICE, 2021-2024 (USD)					
	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Government of China	1 256 372	1 349 098	1 489 801	1 487 817	5 583 089
Private donors	2 628 663	679 105	279 968	220 132	3 807 868
Other United Nations funds and entities (excluding the Central Emergency Response Fund)	200 000				200 000
Total	4 085 035	2 028 203	1 769 769	1 707 949	9 590 957

Source: Distribution contribution and forecast stats 2024-03-18.xlsx by donors, data extracted on 18 June 2024.

Summary of key evaluation conclusions and supporting findings

22. The following section summarizes the six key conclusions of the evaluation, which are based on the evidence presented in the evaluation findings.

Relevance and alignment

Conclusion 1: WFP has provided relevant assistance as China shifts its focus from poverty alleviation to rural revitalization. There is a clear case for WFP to support China as the country continues its development journey and for WFP to transition towards a partnership with China that goes beyond the term of the CSP.

23. WFP's CSP for China has appropriately focused on strategically addressing the root causes of food insecurity in China in order to ensure that food security gains are sustainable. This has been done through livelihoods and nutrition interventions, targeting provinces prioritized by the Government because of their high levels of poverty and targeting key vulnerable groups, particularly left-behind children and smallholder farmers.

24. The CSP was strongly aligned with China's national and subnational priorities, as well as those of the United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework for China. In addition, WFP's focus on nutrition-sensitive value chains complements the approaches of other United Nations entities such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. WFP has also leveraged the United Nations Children's Fund's support for national nutrition programmes to ensure a coherent approach to nutrition interventions in the preschool meal programmes that WFP supports in the

provinces. WFP's targeted support for children aged 3–5 fills a critical gap in national policies, including the 2024 child nutrition plan, which primarily covers primary schoolchildren, pregnant women and children aged 0–24 months.

25. WFP's approach remained relevant over time, as China transitioned from a focus on poverty alleviation to rural revitalization. WFP's nutrition and value chain capacity strengthening consistently aligned with evolving national priorities, supporting local governments working to pilot new approaches that address gaps in nutrition education. Furthermore, WFP responded flexibly to changing circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic and major shifts in private fundraising, including an economic slowdown and geostrategic shifts that led to a sharp drop in company donations after 2021.
26. WFP activities in China contribute to a coherent strategic logic that is clearly outlined in the CSP, but the division between the WFP's centre of excellence in China and the CSP from 2022 onwards resulted in missed opportunities to leverage synergies between domestic and international projects. A great deal of evidence was generated by a preschool meal project, for example, but was not then showcased through the centre of excellence. The wide geographic area over which CSP projects were spread made it difficult to achieve consistent synergies among them.

WFP partnership model

Conclusion 2: WFP has contributed to stronger individual and organizational capacity at the provincial level but missed opportunities to leverage learning from its provincial-level pilots to generate credible and relevant evidence for informing policies at the national level, and ensuring that the approaches being tested and piloted could realistically be scaled up.

27. WFP's capacity strengthening support led to progress in individual and organizational capacity. Partners increased their capacity in project design and monitoring and inclusive targeting approaches, allowing them to develop and test new ways of delivering nutrition support for preschool children, and climate resilience and market linkages for smallholder farmers, including women farmers, older farmers and farmers from minority communities.
28. A memorandum of understanding between WFP and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs is the backbone of WFP's work in China. WFP improved partnerships with authorities at the provincial level, but stakeholders see opportunities to expand policy engagement with national ministries such as the Ministry of Education and the National Health Commission.
29. WFP expanded the breadth of its partnerships at the provincial level, moving beyond directorates of agriculture to include local education and health departments, maternal and child health offices, and universities. An increased focus on interdepartmental coordination helped to strengthen project implementation.
30. WFP leveraged strong and mutually beneficial relationships with private sector partners and academic bodies to promote innovative approaches to addressing poor nutrition and food insecurity in China and around the world. However, overreliance on private sector funding has at times resulted in geographic fragmentation and short-term programming.
31. WFP collaborates well with United Nations partners, but much of this joint United Nations work remains at the level of information sharing, collaboration on policy strengthening, and advocacy campaigns such as the 16 days of activism to end violence against women. The small scale and dispersed nature of United Nations projects in China means that joint programming is not feasible.

Evidence generation and use

Conclusion 3: WFP's country office in China generates much evidence, but not consistently of the types needed to adequately inform the Government in relation to the value of scaling up pilot activities. Key gaps include limited cost-benefit analyses and insufficient evidence of potential returns on investments. WFP greatly increased the number of project-level evaluations, building on the recommendations arising from the evaluation of the previous CSP. However, a lack of in-house technical expertise limited WFP's ability to develop convincing evidence to support the scale-up of projects to the national level.

32. WFP's strategic approach emphasizes the piloting of innovative interventions, followed by engagement with decision-makers on facilitating the scale-up of successful initiatives into national programmes. During the term of the CSP, WFP increased the volume and types of evidence it produced to support CSP implementation. For example, it increased the number of project-level evaluations conducted with provincial academic partners, which led to improved learning, particularly with regard to social and behaviour change, and inclusion. It launched a South-South knowledge hub outside the framework of the CSP, building on findings from some CSP initiatives. It also partnered with media to disseminate information, using media channels to deliver creative outreach, such as through a livestream cooking show that enabled it to showcase zinc-enriched potatoes.
33. However, WFP's lack of relevant in-house technical expertise, combined with the absence of early planning for scale-up strategies from the beginning of project design, contributed to missed opportunities to collect key evidence on matters such as costs versus benefits, and returns on investment. For example, WFP-supported value chain projects achieved mixed levels of uptake, with further work needed on market linkages and risk insurance for the development of evidence-informed scalable approaches. Gaps in the methodologies used also meant that the evidence generated did not always reflect the extent of the progress made and was not always suitable for informing policy engagement. Partners believe that WFP needs more robust, peer-reviewed evidence on policy that is convincing for decision-makers. Weak links to headquarters in Rome and the regional bureau, and a sense that conditions in China were unique, also acted as barriers to the leveraging of technical expertise from the global WFP partnership.
34. Insufficient understanding of the information needs of national decision-makers, and gaps in the evidence available to them, also hindered the effective implementation of WFP's strategy in China. Collectively, the gaps and challenges in achieving the CSP's goals in relation to evidence generation have constrained WFP's ability to support meaningful engagement with national stakeholders who are positioned to scale up successful programmes when appropriate.

Targeting and prioritization

Conclusion 4: WFP was effective in advocating that targeting focus on the most vulnerable people, but its more ambitious approaches to women's empowerment were not implemented.

35. WFP's 2022 targeting strategy for China, combined with its strong approaches to partnership brokering, allowed it to work effectively with provincial partners on identifying and engaging vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind in relation to national development, including women, girls, older farmers, people with disabilities and members of minority groups. This serves as a model for future work on socioeconomic inclusion in China, such as the establishment of community feedback mechanisms.
36. WFP has been very effective in contributing to targeting approaches at the provincial level, including by supporting local officials and academic and private sector bodies in broadening their understanding of inclusion and tailored approaches to the needs of vulnerable groups. However, WFP has not leveraged this experience to inform national targeting strategies, a crucial step if it is to move beyond small pilot projects and support solutions at scale.

37. WFP worked with provincial partners to achieve near parity between men and women in capacity strengthening activities. However, it missed the opportunity to embed ambitious approaches to women's economic empowerment in the design and implementation of interventions, including by supporting tailored approaches to addressing disparities between women and men and increasing rural women's access to assets and financing and their participation in decision-making. United Nations partners reported valuing WFP's insights on the economic opportunities for rural women, highlighting the potential for WFP to do more in this area.
38. People with disabilities were included as beneficiaries in WFP-supported projects but were not consistently given a role in the design or monitoring of those projects, and many project sites were not accessible to them. Nutrition integration and environmental sustainability emerged as key pillars of WFP's capacity strengthening work, helping to localize nutrition-related goals and support measures aimed at reducing the use of water, fertilizer and chemicals and building climate-related resilience along supply chains. WFP missed the opportunity to work consistently with provincial governments on advocating the use of strong beneficiary feedback mechanisms, building on WFP's successful engagement with regard to vulnerability-based targeting. WFP developed strong capacity strengthening approaches to building eco-friendly agriculture, environmental sustainability and nutrition integration, which it can leverage for future programmes.

Sustainability of results and synergies across the portfolio

Conclusion 5: Geographic dispersion and short funding cycles made it harder to demonstrate sustainable results and achieve synergies among WFP's various areas of work.

39. Overall, the evaluation highlights mixed results in relation to the sustainability of CSP activities. WFP-supported value chain projects demonstrate varying levels of sustainability. Provincial authorities have maintained projects beyond the end of WFP's support, but there is no evidence of national scale-up. Short project cycles, gaps in the branding and marketing of beneficiaries' produce, market volatility and climate change risks are key barriers to the broader adoption of project activities. Nutrition projects showed stronger sustainability resulting from effective efforts in social and behaviour change and localized capacity strengthening, but faced challenges caused by rising costs. Gaps in planning and evidence hindered WFP's ability to inform national-level planning for securing sustainable funding and taking projects to scale.
40. Private sector donors were the primary funding source for WFP's activities in 2021, but private sector funding declined sharply from 2022 onwards owing to a broad economic slowdown and shifts in the priorities of private sector donors. Short funding cycles were also highlighted in the evaluation as a key factor undermining long-term sustainability. Many private sector organizations were unable to sustain support beyond their initial three-year investments, compromising the sustainability of the results achieved.
41. Alignment with private sector interests often led to the dispersion of WFP projects across a wide geographic area. This dispersion limited the opportunities to build programmatic synergies and reduced the likelihood of sustainable gains. While WFP worked hard to promote synergies among its various areas of capacity support, vast distances meant that links between programmes were often ad hoc. For example, WFP integrated support for smallholder farmers into its nutrition programme, helping farmers to establish supply chains for providing vegetables to schools and central kitchens. However, these relationships often did not continue after WFP's support ended. For example, one private sector partner supported a one-time purchase of zinc-enriched potatoes produced under activity 1 for a local preschool meal programme, but the initiative was not sustained.

Strategic direction

Conclusion 6: Fragmented strategy has made it more challenging to set a clear strategic trajectory for growing the relationship between WFP and China and demonstrating sustainable results.

42. The hybrid nature of WFP's presence in China, which is part country office, part global office and part centre of excellence, combines multiple strategic models. The formal separation between the centre of excellence and the CSP from 2022 onwards has made it more challenging to define a coherent engagement strategy. This division has also contributed to a disconnect from WFP's global-level technical approaches and systems.
43. The split contributed to a lack of programmatic clarity as WFP's China-focused, international, South-South cooperation and humanitarian hub activities were split among multiple strategies and managed by different units at WFP headquarters in Rome. This made it more challenging to reach a common understanding with regard to priorities and to report on progress and challenges in a holistic way, contributing to confusion among staff and stakeholders, and greater strategic drift. Removing South-South cooperation from the CSP also made WFP's work in China something of an outlier, as 87 percent of WFP's CSPs worldwide include South-South cooperation to some extent.
44. The decision to remove the activities of the centre of excellence from the CSP also contributed to missed opportunities for synergies. For example, there are no policy briefings on WFP's approach to preschool meal programmes, and only two brief case studies on the South-South cooperation knowledge-sharing platform, despite significant investment from WFP. WFP's employees and partners saw potential to increase synergies between CSP programmes in China and international programmes, with small-scale innovative pilot projects contributing to global learning on nutrition and food security approaches while deepening communication and partnerships with the Government.
45. To increase synergies WFP's China country office introduced an integrated organizational chart in August 2024, but it is too early to assess its effectiveness. The office reports to WFP headquarters in Rome, rather than to the regional office for Asia and the Pacific, in recognition of the global partnership function of WFP in China. Given the hybrid role of WFP in China, coordination will be needed at both the country and the global levels for WFP in China to be able to fully articulate its strategic opportunities and leverage its significant global, national and provincial networks in order to grow its partnership with China in line with the country's increasing presence worldwide.

Recommendations

46. The evaluation makes two strategic and three operational recommendations that are based on the key findings and conclusions.

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 1: Use the next CSP to articulate a pathway by which WFP can transition to a relationship with China that goes beyond the term of the CSP and is in line with China's post-2030 development agenda.	Strategic, domestic and global	Country office	Multilateral and Programme Country Partnerships Division, country office South-South cooperation unit, and Supply Chain and Delivery Division	High	November 2025
1.1 Provide a holistic vision for WFP's engagement in China, focusing on the "leave no one behind" agenda, and covering domestic and international programmes and the centre of excellence so as to promote strategic clarity and synergies among programmes.				High	November 2025
1.2 Conduct an independent evaluation of the centre of excellence to provide a basis for setting realistic targets and integrating the centre into WFP's broader strategy for its work in China.				Medium	June 2026
1.3 Focus WFP's efforts in China on the development of comprehensive nutrition-focused, climate-smart and risk-resilient food systems.				High	November 2025
1.4 In the next CSP, embed an ambitious vision of how to grow the partnership with China as an enabler of achievements under the CSP. This will remove the need to include partnerships as a stand-alone area of activity in the next CSP.				Medium	November 2025

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 2: Set out an ambitious strategy for growing WFP and China's partnership to address zero hunger worldwide, in line with SDG 2 and commensurate with China's increasing global presence.	Strategic and global partnerships	Country office	Multilateral and Programme Country Partnerships Division; Private Sector Corporate Partnerships Unit	Medium	June 2026
2.1 Develop a three-phase engagement strategy for building partnerships with the Government by demonstrating results to show that WFP can deliver; expanding the focus of partnerships beyond food assistance to include food solutions; and working with China to secure more funding, including more multi-year funding, based on shared areas of interest.				Medium	June 2026
2.2 Strengthen the country office's partnership brokering capacity by identifying and developing appropriate initiatives for building the global partnership between WFP and China on achieving zero hunger.				High	June 2026
2.3 Test the effectiveness of increasing investment in private fundraising initiatives, track the returns on investment, and build evidence of the optimal levels of investment.				High	June 2026
Recommendation 3: Increase the duration and tighten the geographic focus of CSP programmes in China, and bring together successes from past pilot projects into a comprehensive package of support.	Operational and domestic programmes	Country office		Medium	January 2026
3.1 Pilot the use of a ten-year project design cycle. Three years is a too short period for implementing				Medium	December 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
a pilot project, learning from it, and demonstrating the results.					
3.2 Pilot area-based programming. Combine successful approaches and learning from past programmes into a holistic, geographically focused package of support that promotes synergies among nutrition, value chain and climate smart approaches.				Medium	December 2026
3.3 Blend public and private financing with a view to increasing the predictability of financing for projects.				High	June 2026
3.4 Develop detailed scale-up plans during project design and review and update them annually.				High	January 2026
Recommendation 4: Develop approaches for sustainable change towards gender equality and women's empowerment to address underlying imbalances and improve women's leadership, resources and finance; include people with disabilities in project design, and integrate end-user feedback tailored to conditions in China.	Operational and domestic programmes	Country office	Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service	Medium	September 2025
4.1 Develop a tailored strategy for identifying opportunities to address underlying imbalances and promote gender-transformative approaches that foster women's leadership, control over resources and assets, and access to financing.				High	September 2025
4.2 Consult organizations of people with disabilities and women's organizations during project design and monitoring.				High	June 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.3 Develop targeted approaches to ensure that project designs are suitable for older people, who make up an increasing proportion of China's rural population. Collect age-disaggregated data, building on the successful approach to the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data under the previous CSP.				Medium	June 2026
4.4 Test approaches appropriate to conditions in China to ensure that the end-users of projects can provide feedback, and lessons can be used to improve delivery.				Medium	December 2026
Recommendation 5: Invest in the capacity of the WFP country office in China to generate credible evidence as a basis for decision-making in relation to efforts to strengthen food security and nutrition in China and around the world.	Operational, domestic and global	Country office	Multilateral and Programme Country Partnerships Division	High	June 2026
5.1 Complement WFP's partnership brokering skills with collaboration with technical experts to support the gathering and use of robust data; the preparation of peer reviewed policy papers; and engagement with experts and decision-makers on domestic and international approaches to strengthening food security and nutrition.				High	June 2026
5.2 Measure cost-efficiency and returns on investment to provide credible evidence as a basis for the development of effective and sustainable approaches to improving nutrition and food security.				High	June 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
5.3 Build a robust knowledge management system for capturing and disseminating evidence and lessons for use in domestic and international programmes.				High	December 2026

1. Introduction

1.1 Evaluation features

1. Country strategic plans (CSP) encompass the entirety of WFP activities in a country during a specific period. This CSP evaluation assesses WFP contributions to the CSP's strategic outcomes in China, establishing plausible causal relations between the outputs of WFP activities, the implementation process, the operational environment, and changes observed at the outcome level, including any unintended consequences. The current China CSP is scheduled to continue until December 2025. The timing of this evaluation serves to inform discussions on the future of WFP engagement in China and the contents of the subsequent CSP to be presented to the WFP Executive Board in November 2025.
2. This evaluation is commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation (OEV). The evaluation serves the dual and mutually reinforcing objectives of accountability (performance and results of the operation) and learning (the reasons why certain results occurred or not). The country strategic plan evaluation (CSPE) was designed to respond to the key evaluation questions outlined in the terms of reference (ToR) (Annex 1) and developed further in the evaluation matrix (Annex 2).
3. The evaluation covers the period from November 2020 to September 2024, reviewing the CSP for China 2022-2025. The evaluation was conducted by an independent team of three evaluators from the KonTerra Group (KonTerra). The evaluation team conducted data collection from 26 August to 9 September 2024 with field work covering Beijing, Gansu, Hunan, Jilin and Anhui (through remote interviews).
4. The main users for this evaluation are the WFP China country office (CO) and its stakeholders, including the regional bureau in Bangkok (RBB), headquarters technical divisions, the Government of China, and other partners. The CSP evaluation will also serve to inform the Government of China, United Nations agencies, regional entities and local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the lessons learned, and it presents recommendations based on the essential findings for the future engagement of WFP in the country.

1.2 Context

General overview

5. The People's Republic of China, with an estimated 1.42 billion people, is one of the largest countries in the world, both in terms of area and population. China is one of the fastest aging countries in the world, with a declining population due to low fertility and net negative migration. This places pressure on old age support and care, labour markets and consumption patterns.⁸ Life expectancy reached 78 years in 2023. Fertility rates declined from 6 live births per woman to 1.5 over 30 years, with an adolescent fertility rate of 11 percent.⁹ A change in state policy in 2021 allowed families to have three children, up from two in 2016.¹⁰

Economy and poverty

6. China has achieved robust economic growth since 1978, transforming from an agrarian society into the world's second-largest economy.¹¹ China's gross domestic product (GDP) (USD 17.8 trillion) is 17 percent

⁸ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2024. China in Numbers (2023). Wang and Mason. 2007. Transition and Challenge: China's Population at the Beginning of the 21st Century.

⁹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2022. World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision, Total fertility rate, China. World Bank, 2021, Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19), China. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division. 2022. World Population Prospects: The 2022 Revision, Life expectancy at birth, China.

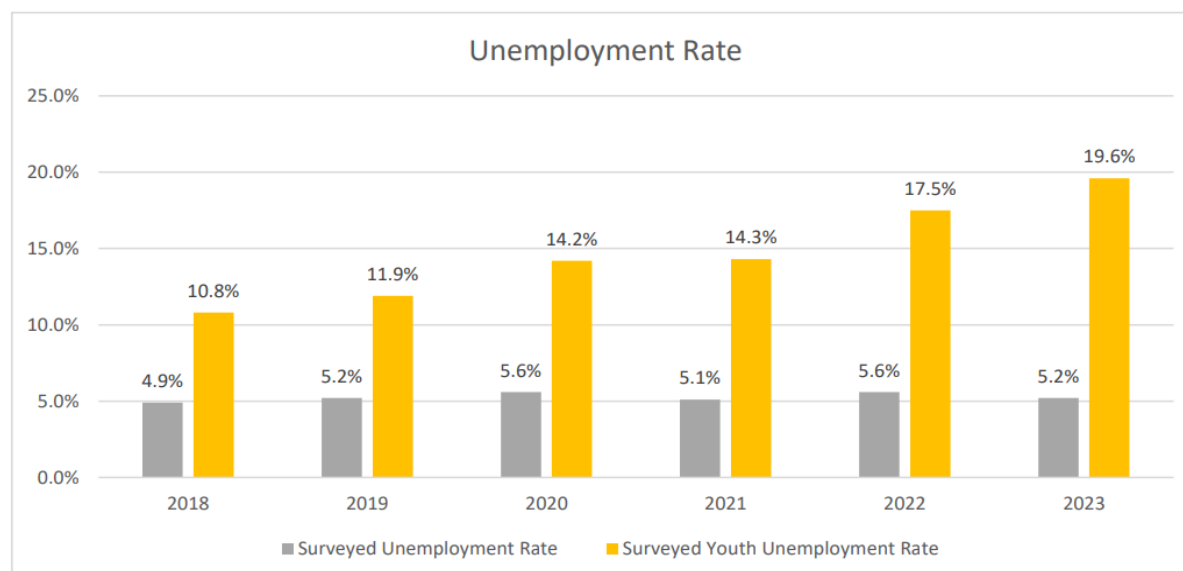
¹⁰ BBC. China allows three children in major policy shift, 31 May 2021.

¹¹ World Bank. 2024. Consulted on 19 June 2024.

of global production, comparable to the European Union (EU).¹² Gross domestic product per capita is USD 13,140.¹³ COVID-19, declining labour force and productivity growth, slowdown in the property sector and debt have impacted on growth, but it is still high by global standards (5.2 percent in 2023).¹⁴

7. Unemployment is low (5 percent in 2023, 4.3 percent for women). However, youth and rural unemployment is significantly higher (up to three times higher in some areas).¹⁵

Figure 1: Unemployment (general and youth) (2018-2023)



Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2024. China in numbers (2023)

8. Over the past 40 years, the number of people in China living below the international poverty line (USD 1.90 per day) has fallen by 800 million, with extreme poverty eradicated in 2020 (see Table 1).¹⁶ However, China faces imbalances, with a quarter of the population (24.7 percent) estimated to be living on less than USD 6.85 a day in 2020.¹⁷ Rural poverty is triple the rate of urban areas.¹⁸

¹² International Monetary Fund. 2024. World Economic Outlook (April 2024), GDP, current prices, Consulted on 19 June 2024.

¹³ International Monetary Fund. 2024. World Economic Outlook, April 2024, GDP per capita, current prices, consulted on 19 June 2024.

¹⁴ UNDP. 2024. China in Numbers (2023). Reuters, 16 April 2024, China's economy grew faster than expected in the March quarter. World Bank, 2024, Consulted on 19 June 2024. International Monetary Fund, 2024, World Economic Outlook—Steady but Slow: Resilience amid Divergence. Reuters, 13 May 2024, China's consumer prices rise for third month, signalling demand recovery. International Monetary Fund. 2024. World Economic Outlook (April 2024), Inflation rate, average consumer prices, consulted on 19 June 2024.


¹⁵ World Bank Data. 2024. Unemployment total (% of total labour force) (modelled ILO estimate), consulted on 19 June 2024. National Bureau of Statistics of China, 17 January 2024, National Economy Witnessed Momentum of Recovery with Solid Progress in High-quality Development in 2023. South China Morning Post, 11 April 2024, China's gender gap widening post-pandemic, with 'she-cession' still real threat to economy. Wang, Zhang, Yu, Gao, Shi, 2022, Number of Children and Female Labour Participation in China.

¹⁶ World Bank. 2024. Consulted on 19 June 2024. United Nations China. 2020. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the People's Republic of China 2021-2025.

¹⁷ World Bank. 2024. Percent Population living on less than USD 6.85 a day (in 2017 PPP terms). Consulted on 19 June 2024

¹⁸ UNDP. 2023. Multidimensional Poverty Index 2023.

Table 1: Poverty and extreme poverty rates in China (percentage of the total population) (2017-2020)

		Poverty rate (latest data)		Extreme poverty rate (latest data)	
		2017	2020	2017	2020
	Total	32%	24.7%	0.7%	0%

Source: World Bank. 2020. Poverty headcount ratio at USD 2.15 a day (2017 purchasing power parity (PPP)), Poverty headcount ratio at USD 6.85 a day (2017 PPP)

National policies and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

9. China's economy is regulated by the 14th Five-Year-Plan for Economic and Social Development (2021-2025), which includes a focus on bridging internal development gaps.¹⁹ With the eradication of extreme poverty in 2020, China transitioned its focus from poverty alleviation to rural revitalization, including sustaining food security gains, avoiding a large-scale return to poverty and enhancing rural construction and governance.²⁰

10. China hosts 17 United Nations entities under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025, which focuses on three priorities: people and prosperity; planet; and partnerships.²¹

11. China's 2023 SDG progress report indicates that several SDGs have already been achieved, including SDG 1 (no poverty), most indicators of SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure). The report notes that further work is needed to reach SDGs on gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and goals related to consumption, climate action and biodiversity (SDGs 12 to 15).²²

Food insecurity and nutrition

12. China has a complex food system geared both to feed its huge population and for exports. China has made tremendous progress in reducing hunger in recent decades.²³ China's achievement of the 2015 Millennium Development Goal target of halving the proportion of its people suffering from hunger accounted for almost two thirds of such reductions globally.²⁴

13. China has made significant progress in reducing malnutrition, including achieving the SDG targets for less than 2.5 percent undernourishment in the total population, less than 5 percent stunting and less than 2 percent wasting in children under 5 years of age. Compared to 2013, there has been an over 50 percent decrease in stunting rates, though nutrition indicators are worse in rural and impoverished regions.²⁵

14. Key nutrition challenges in China are people who are overweight or obese, and micronutrient deficiency. Anaemia among children aged 6-17 decreased from 6.6 percent in 2015 to 6.1 percent in 2020.²⁶ Current Chinese diets are characterized by overconsumption of cereals and meat, insufficient intake of vegetables and fruits, and excessive use of cooking oil and salt.²⁷ Over a third (34 percent) (urban 34.4

¹⁹ United Nations China. 2020. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the People's Republic of China 2021-2025.

²⁰ Xinhua. China's No. 1 central document for 2024 charts roadmap for rural revitalization, 3 February 2024.

²¹ United Nations China. 2024. 2023 Annual Results Report.

²² CIDCA. September 2023. China's Progress Report on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Sachs, J.D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2024). The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future. Sustainable Development Report 2024. Paris: SDSN, Dublin: Dublin University Press. 10.25546/108572. China data available at <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/china>.

²³ International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). 2024. Global Food Policy Report.

²⁴ WFP China Country Strategic Plan 2017-2021

²⁵ WFP China Country Strategic Plan 2022-2025. IFPRI, 2024, Global Food Policy Report. WFP China Annual Country Report 2023.

²⁶ WFP China Country Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

²⁷ IFPRI. 2024. Global Food Policy Report.

percent, rural 34.2 percent) of Chinese residents above 18 years old were overweight in 2020, and 16.4 percent (urban 17.5 percent, rural 15.3 percent) were obese. In 2020, 8.0 percent of boys and 5.4 percent of girls under 5 years were overweight and 3.6 percent (4.2 percent of boys, 2.7 percent of girls) were obese.²⁸ Over half of rural residents' nutrient intake does not meet dietary standards, increasing the risk of nutrition-related chronic diseases.²⁹ Chinese children also face the issue of zinc deficiency. In 2017, the overall zinc deficiency rate among children was 9.6 percent, but this rate exceeds 20 percent in certain regions, such as the Fujian and Zhejiang provinces. Over 80 percent of children aged 7 to 13 in Gansu province had zinc intake below the estimated average requirement.³⁰

15. China supports large-scale nutrition programmes that aim to reduce anaemia and obesity and improve nutrition knowledge, with strong coverage of school-aged children, pregnant women and children under 2. However, there is currently a gap in nutrition programmes for children aged from 3 to 5 (EQ 1.1).³¹

Agriculture

16. The contribution of agriculture, forestry and fisheries to the gross domestic product in China has declined from 40 percent to 7.1 percent since the late 1960s.³² China provides 95 percent of total food for about 20 percent of the world's population, with only 8 percent of the world's arable land.³³ Between 2013 and 2019, China reported a 5 percent decline in arable land due to destructive farming practices and repurposing of agricultural land. To address this, China implemented the National High-Standard Farmland Construction Plan (2021–2030).³⁴ China is self-sufficient in rice and wheat but faces growing demand for imported meat and dairy products as incomes increase.³⁵

17. China's agricultural landscape is dominated by small family farms, with most (95 percent) cultivated land managed by around 200 million smallholder farmers. The WFP CSP reports that smallholder farmers, 60 percent of whom are women, remain vulnerable due to their modest incomes, limited access to technology and financial support, insufficient market connectivity and a lack of empowerment and capacity to manage risks.³⁶ This contributes to rural-urban migration, leaving rural communities increasingly older and less educated.³⁷

Climate change and vulnerability

18. China faces significant vulnerability to climatic hazards with approximately one third of China's agricultural land affected by natural hazards, including storms, droughts, floods, land subsidence and landslides. Annual losses from natural hazards average USD 76 billion.³⁸ China is facing water scarcity due to overuse, pollution and climate change, limiting the amount of water available for irrigation and agriculture.³⁹

19. According to the World Bank, China contributes nearly one third of annual global carbon dioxide emissions and 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions.⁴⁰

²⁸ National Health Commission (NHC). 2024. Dietary Guidelines for Adult Obesity (2024 Edition).

²⁹ IFPRI. 2024. Global Food Policy Report. WFP China Annual Country Report 2023.

³⁰ WFP Endline Report of Gansu Potato Project.

³¹ WFP China Annual Country Report 2023.

³² World Bank Group data, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS?locations=CN>.

³³ Huang Jikun and Yang Guolei, 2017, Understanding Recent Challenges and New Food Policy in China, Global Food Security 12 (2017).

³⁴ Centre for Strategic and International Studies. 2024. China's Food Security: Key Challenges and Emerging Policy Responses.

³⁵ Bishwajit. 2014. Food security and food self-sufficiency in China: From past to 2050.

³⁶ WFP China Country Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

³⁷ WFP China Country Strategic Plan 2022-2025. WFP China Annual Country Report 2023.

³⁸ World Bank. Climate Change Knowledge Portal. China, Consulted on 19 June 2024.

³⁹ Observer Research Foundation (ORF). 2023. Food security in China and its role in pushing the G20 Agenda.

⁴⁰ World Bank. 2024. Consulted on 19 June 2024.

Education

20. China has achieved two of the four SDG 4 targets: lower secondary completion rate (100 percent; achieved in 2012) and youth literacy rate (99.8 percent; achieved in 2020).⁴¹ Lower secondary completion remains high as of 2022 (latest data) at 95.5 percent. Literacy and primary school completion rates are comparable between girls and boys and rural and urban areas.⁴²

21. As of 2020 (latest data), China had 149,100 primary schools with over 1.07 billion students.⁴³ As of 2019 (latest data), 79.2 percent of China's population had at least a secondary education.⁴⁴

Gender, equity and wider inclusion issues

22. China's Human Development Index (HDI) improved to 0.788 in 2022, placing it in the "high human development" category. However, income inequality (Gini coefficient) is higher than the average for Asia-Pacific economies.⁴⁵ Rural to urban migration is driving income inequality and resulting in "left-behind children" raised by elderly grandparent in rural areas.⁴⁶

23. The UNSDCF identifies the groups at most risk of economic exclusion in China as rural migrant workers in urban areas, people living in remote regions, persons with disabilities, the growing elderly population, left-behind rural children, rural smallholder farmers, informal sector workers, victims of human trafficking and people living with HIV.⁴⁷

24. China ranked 106th on the Global Gender Gap Index in 2024. China has a 10 percent gender gap in its labour force participation rate, with women labour force participation declining since 1990. Women are disproportionately represented in vulnerable economic sectors and spend 2.5 times as much time on unpaid domestic and care work than men, although this is better than the global average.⁴⁸

Migration and humanitarian protection

25. There were an estimated 0.9 million registered migrants in China in 2020, predominantly from Vietnam.⁴⁹ As of January 2023, 326 urban refugees were registered in mainland China and 300 persons of concern to UNHCR in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR).⁵⁰

International assistance

26. China is the world's largest provider of development finance, much of it in the form of bilateral loans (including subsidized loans).⁵¹ Official development assistance (ODA) statistics show that China is a net contributor to international development assistance (net ODA inflows were negative USD 565.4 million for 2021, meaning China gives half a billion more in ODA than it receives).⁵²

⁴¹ United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Data Services, 2024, China Country Profile.

⁴² United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Convention for the Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions (CFPS), 2018, Primary completion rate in China.

⁴³ Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2023, MOE releases statistical report on China's educational achievements in 2022.

⁴⁴ CIDCA, September 2023, China's Progress Report on Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

⁴⁵ UNDP. 2024. China in Numbers (2023).

⁴⁶ National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2024, National Economy Witnessed Momentum of Recovery with Solid Progress in High-quality Development in 2023. UNDP, 2024, China in Numbers (2023). United Nations China, 2024, 2023 Annual Results Report.

⁴⁷ United Nations China. 2020. UNSDCF 2021-2025. UNDP, 2024, China in Numbers (2023). United Nations China, 2020, Summary of Common Country Analysis – United Nations in China.

⁴⁸ UN Women. 2023. Care work in China: Who does care work, what is its economic value and how has it been affected by COVID-19? World Bank accessed 19/06/2024. Global Development Policy Center 4/10/2023. UNDP accessed 19/06/2024

⁴⁹ OECD, International Migration Outlook, 2023, China, consulted on 19 June 2024

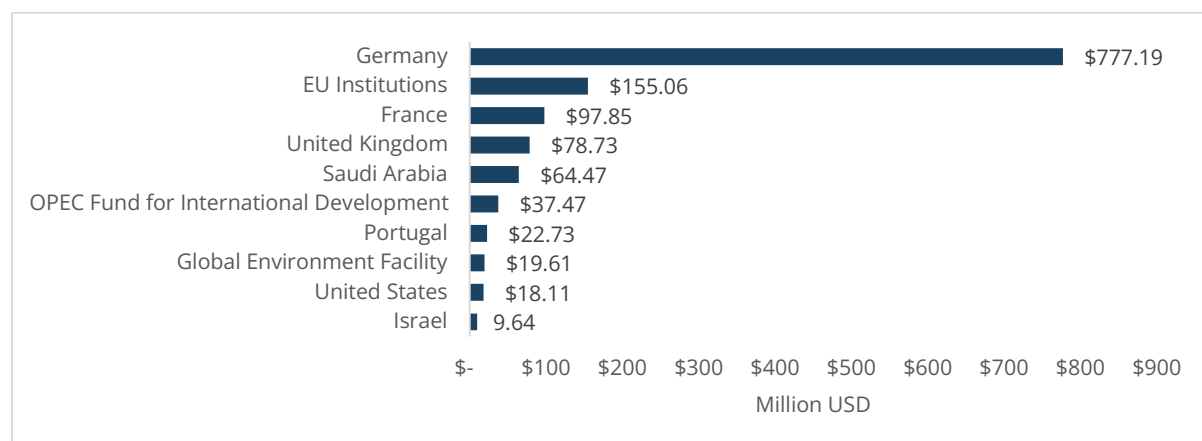
⁵⁰ United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). 2023. People's Republic of China - Factsheet. OECD. International Migration Outlook, 2023, China, consulted on 19 June 2024.

⁵¹ Cameron Hill. China's aid. In DevPolicy Blog, Development Policy Centre, ANU, 24 October 2024. Dreher A, Fuchs A, Parks B, Strange A, Tierney MJ. *Banking on Beijing: The Aims and Impacts of China's Overseas Development Programme*. Cambridge University Press; 2022. WFP FACTORY data, extracted 21 May 2024.

⁵² OECD DAC data, extracted 28 June 2024.

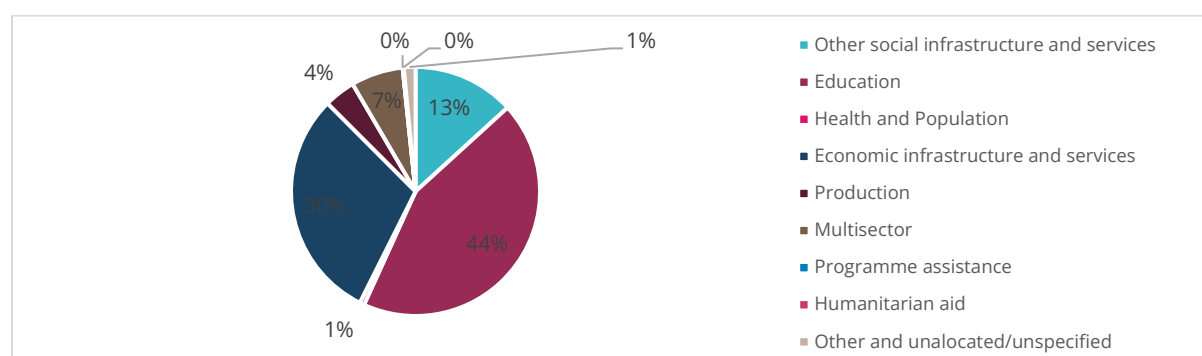
27. The largest sources of official development assistance into China came from Germany, followed by the European Union and France (Figure 2). The largest sector for ODA was education (44 percent), followed by economic infrastructure and services (30 percent) and other social infrastructure and services (13 percent) (Figure 3).

Figure 2: Official development assistance into China (2020-2021)



Source: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development' Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC), data extracted 18 June 2024

Figure 3: Official development assistance by sector (2021)

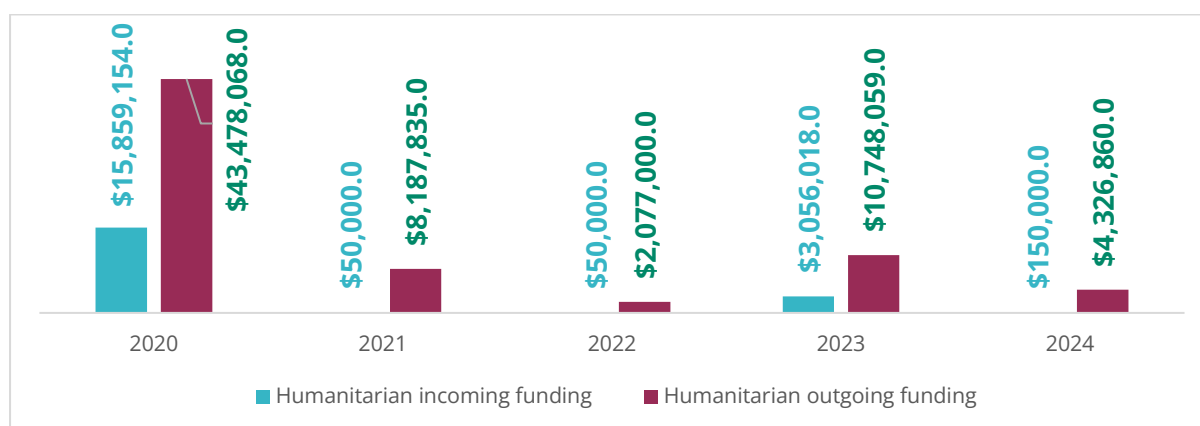


Source: OECD DAC, data extracted 18 June 2024

28. China provided USD 10.7 million in humanitarian assistance towards United Nations (UN) appeals in 2023 (Figure 4) and larger sums in bilateral humanitarian assistance outside of UN tracked contributions. China has provided funding to WFP for global programmes to address zero hunger (see paragraph 31 below).⁵³

⁵³ KII with WFP staff and Government of China officials, June 2024. Dreher A, Fuchs A, Parks B, Strange A, Tierney MJ. *Banking on Beijing: The Aims and Impacts of China's Overseas Development Program*. Cambridge University Press; 2022.

Figure 4: Humanitarian aid flows to and from China recorded on the Financial Tracking System of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (2020 to 2024)



Source: Office for the Coordination of Human Affairs (OCHA) Financial Tracking System, extracted 18 June 2024

1.3 Subject being evaluated

29. **Background:** The WFP Country Strategic Plan (2022-2025) in China was approved by the Executive Board in June 2022 and started in July 2022. The previous WFP Strategic Plan (2017-2021) was extended for the first six months of 2022 to cover the gap and to allow for additional deliberation on the new strategy. The CSP continued to provide advice and assistance to provincial authorities, primarily the Directorates of Agriculture, Education and Health, in previous poverty counties of China to improve livelihoods and nutrition. This work is funded by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) and the Chinese and international private sector. WFP also continued to build and strengthen partnerships with the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) and the China International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE), which are tasked with monitoring the implementation of China's international development assistance, and the Chinese private sector to support the WFP global mission to achieve zero hunger (SGD 2) (EQ 4.1).

30. **Country strategic plan:** The CSP aims to provide an enabling framework for WFP and China to collaborate on innovative approaches to improve the nutrition of preschool children and address rural vulnerability in targeted areas. These domestic activities were also intended to strengthen the WFP-China partnership and contribute to an enhanced and more visible profile of WFP in China. CSP activities aim to generate important lessons for global efforts to reduce hunger and facilitate new fundraising channels with both private and public institutions in China to support domestic and international programmes. The CSP is built on the assumption that the Government of China and the Chinese private sector are willing to work with WFP to pilot and test new approaches, that the Government will fund the scale up of successful pilots and integrate them into national programmes and that the lessons from the WFP China CSP can be successfully leveraged and applied to global efforts to improve nutrition and livelihoods.⁵⁴

31. **Strategic outcomes and activities:** The CSP is delivered through one strategic outcome and three activities. **Activity 1 (value chains)** aims to improve incomes, production and climate resilience among smallholder farmers by: piloting new crop varieties; aggregating farmers into cooperatives; supporting improved connections to markets through certification and brand development and piloting innovative approaches like zinc-enriched potatoes; improving irrigation and fertilization techniques (fertigation); and risk insurance. During the evaluation period, WFP supported four Act 1 programmes in Gansu (zinc-enriched potatoes), Jilin (risk insurance and fertigation), Yanqing (agribusiness for people with disability) and Anhui (Kiwi value chains) (Figure 7). **Activity 2 (preschool feeding)** aims to improve the nutritional status of children in underdeveloped rural areas by supporting nutritious preschool meals. WFP has supported six preschool feeding pilots across four provinces, Gansu, Sichuan, Guangxi and Hunan (Figure 7). In line with WFP country capacity strengthening delivery modality, projects are implemented by local government

⁵⁴ WFP China. CSP 2022-2025. Reconstructed theory of change developed by the evaluation team in June 2024, see Figure 9.

project management offices (PMOs), with WFP providing upstream support for inclusive design, vulnerability targeting, project monitoring and evidence generation to encourage scale-up through provincial and national programmes (see country capacity strengthening below). **Activity 3** focuses on building partnerships with the Government of China (MARA, CIDCA) and the Chinese private sector to fund efforts to achieve zero hunger (SDG 2) in China and globally (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of the WFP China CSP 2022-2025

Focus area	Strategic outcome	Activities	Modality	Target group
Root causes	SO 1: People, including left-behind groups in rural areas of China, have improved nutrition status and livelihoods in line with national targets by 2025	Act 1: Value chains	Country capacity strengthening	Smallholder famers, especially women, elderly and people with disability in previous rural poverty counties
		Act 2: Preschool feeding programmes	Country capacity strengthening	Children aged 3 to 5 in previous rural poverty counties, especially left behind children ⁵⁵
		Act 3: Facilitation for development and humanitarian cooperation	Global partnerships	Government and Chinese private sector

Source: Evaluation team

32. **Key government partners:** MARA is the national focal point and WFP China's main counterpart. It serves as the WFP "window ministry",⁵⁶ the formal avenue to negotiate programmes and priorities. The 2016 memorandum of understanding (MoU) between WFP and MARA provides the overarching framework for the engagement of WFP in the country. MARA is the main source of funding for WFP China's CSP and funds South-South cooperation and WFP global programmes outside the CSP. WFP also engages closely with CIDCA and China's International Centre for Economic and Technical Exchanges (CICETE), which are tasked with monitoring implementation of China's international development assistance. WFP is the largest recipient of Chinese multilateral funding, receiving USD 161.4 million in funding from CIDCA⁵⁷ and its predecessor the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) since 2016.⁵⁸

33. **Country capacity strengthening:** WFP China works solely through country capacity strengthening (CCS); there are no cash-based transfers or food distributions. The aim of WFP capacity strengthening is to support local authorities in poverty counties to promote targeted, innovative approaches to address the gap in livelihoods and nutrition in less socioeconomically developed rural areas. China has a strong enabling environment in place to address rural-urban inequalities, including large-scale, well-funded national programmes and policies targeted to poverty alleviation and rural revitalization. China also has strong institutional capacity at both the national and provincial levels. As such, WFP has focused its country capacity strengthening efforts on supporting programme design and engaging non-government actors. WFP capacity strengthening is mostly delivered through on-the-job mentoring to Directorate of Agriculture and Education's staff on programme design and monitoring, though WFP also delivers training on topics such as inclusion and vulnerability targeting. Mentoring by WFP has largely focused on strengthening programme design to include vulnerable people, promoting collaboration across government ministries, private sector and academia and strengthening project monitoring and reporting. WFP China also focuses

⁵⁵ Children whose parents have moved to urban areas for work, often leaving them in the care of grandparents.

⁵⁶ Each international organization in China is allocated a window ministry to coordinate their activities.

⁵⁷ CIDCA was established in 2018.

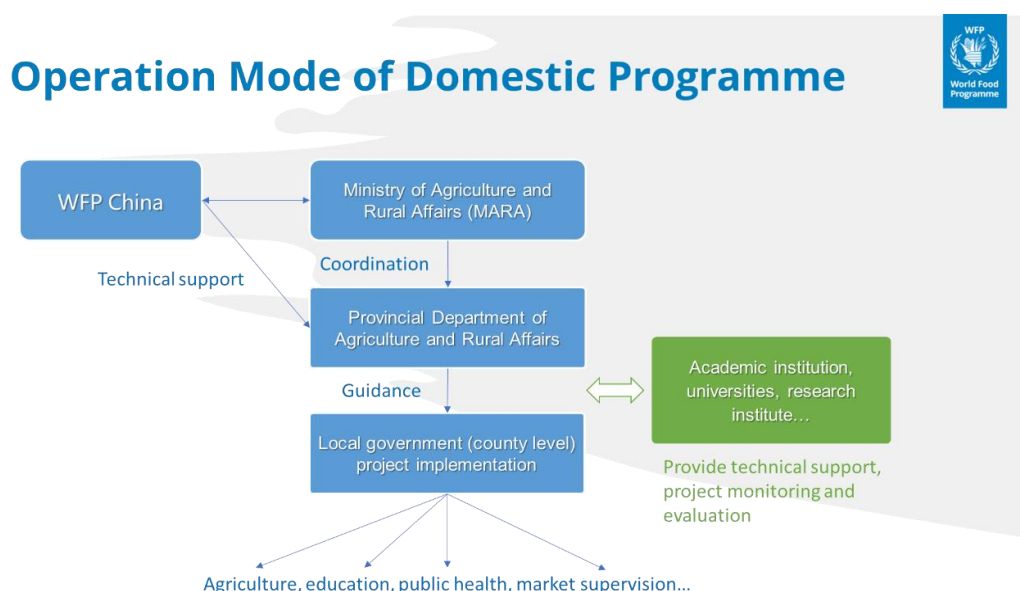
⁵⁸ WFP China. ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. WFP China. Presentation on Government Partnerships. Sept 2024. KIs. WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024. United Nations China. 2024. 2023 Annual Results Report.

on evidence generation to advocate for increased funding to scale up pilots and integrate lessons into national policies and programmes (see pilot projects below).

34. **Pilot projects:** Given China's vast geography and population, and the presence of well-funded national poverty alleviation plans, WFP China focuses on promoting pilots at the provincial and county levels, then working with Chinese universities to generate evidence to promote scale-up of these approaches into provincial and national programmes (EQ 3.2). WFP has increased its evidence generation under this CSP, following recommendations from the previous CSPE 2021. This includes producing more project-level evaluations, increasing public communication on the work of WFP in China and publishing more lessons on the Centre of Excellence for South-South cooperation webpage. WFP also engaged with national actors through annual retreats and project review meetings.

35. **The WFP technical cooperation model:** WFP negotiates overall project design and selection of partner provinces with the national Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA). WFP then works with the Department of Rural Affairs (DARA) in the selected provinces to select suitable counties for project implementation. DARA sets up a project management office made up of county-level officials responsible for agriculture, education, public health and market supervision to implement the project, with WFP supporting project design, beneficiary selection and monitoring (Figure 5, EQs 3.2 and 4.3). The technical cooperation model ensures strong alignment with national and provincial priorities (EQ 1.1).

Figure 5: the WFP technical cooperation model



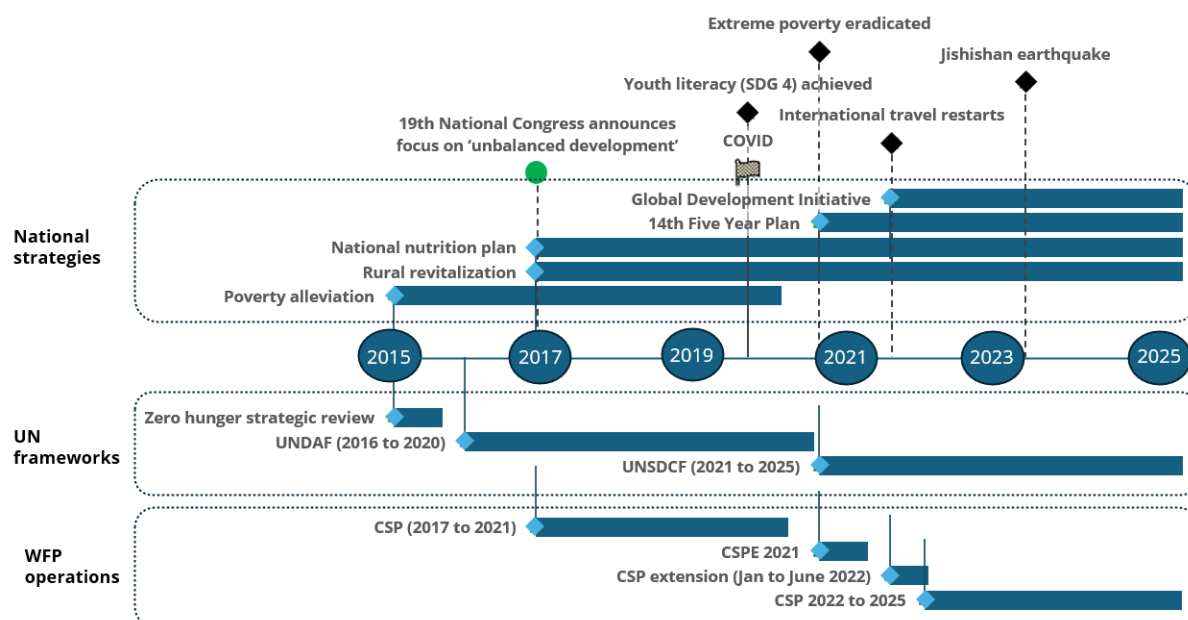
Source: WFP, briefing of domestic programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024

36. **Evolution of the CSP:** The CSP largely continued the same strategic approach from the previous CSP 2017-2021. However, the CSP underwent a reorganization of activities, with all activities listed under one strategic outcome instead of five. WFP continued to support preschool feeding, value chains and facilitate fundraising partnerships (with some change to activity numbers). However, support for South-South cooperation was moved outside the CSP and WFP dropped the objective of supporting disaster preparedness and response due to the high level of existing capacity and lack of government appetite for international support. In April 2020, WFP and the Government of China also announced a global humanitarian hub in response to COVID-19.⁵⁹ Like South-South cooperation, this hub also sits outside the CSP. See Annex 3 for a summary of changes between the previous and current CSP.

⁵⁹ WFP, WFP launches a global humanitarian hub in China to support efforts against COVID -19, 30 April 2020, available at <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-launches-global-humanitarian-hub-china-support-efforts-against-covid-19>.

37. In 2020, China announced that it had eradicated extreme poverty.⁶⁰ This signalled a transition in focus from China's poverty alleviation campaign, which involved massive investment in infrastructure, social services and housing in poverty counties, towards rural revitalization, which focuses on sustaining food security gains, avoiding a large-scale return to poverty and enhancing rural construction and governance.⁶¹ China experienced an earthquake in Jishishan, Gansu province on 18 December 2023, near WFP project areas. However, the Government of China managed the earthquake response and did not require or request WFP support (Figure 6).⁶²

Figure 6 Timeline – WFP interventions and China country context (2015-2024)



Source: Evaluation team

38. **Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE):** The CSP 2022-2025 commits to supporting transformative gender results at the activity level and commits to allocating 15 percent of its budget to projects with gender equality and women's empowerment considerations by 2025.⁶³ No gender-specific indicators are found in the CSP logframe, though beneficiary data is consistently disaggregated by gender (not always by age). The country office has not completed a standalone gender analysis.⁶⁴

39. **Accountability to affected persons and other cross-cutting priorities:** In 2023, WFP China added indicators on environmental sustainability, protection and accountability to the CSP logframe. Prior to this, the CSP did not have any cross-cutting indicators. The CSP 2022-2025 does not include specific commitments related to disability, however it does commit to disaggregating data by disability "where feasible". The protection and accountability indicators both report on the same metric – progress towards the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy (UNDIS) entity accountability framework.

40. **Geographic coverage:** WFP value chains (Act 1) and nutrition activities (Act 2) in China focus on seven provinces: Gansu, Jilin, Hunan, Guangxi, Sichuan, Anhui and Beijing. WFP China's partnership facilitation work (Act 3) largely focuses on national ministries in Beijing and major companies in Beijing and Shanghai (Figure 7). WFP China aims to facilitate synergies across its activities, for example including a component on linking to smallholder farmers (Act 1) under the preschool feeding programme (Act 2).

⁶⁰ World Bank. 2024. Consulted on 19 June 2024. United Nations China. 2020. United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for the People's Republic of China 2021-2025.

⁶¹ Xinhua. China's No. 1 central document for 2024 charts roadmap for rural revitalization, 3 February 2024.

⁶² KII with WFP staff, June 2024.

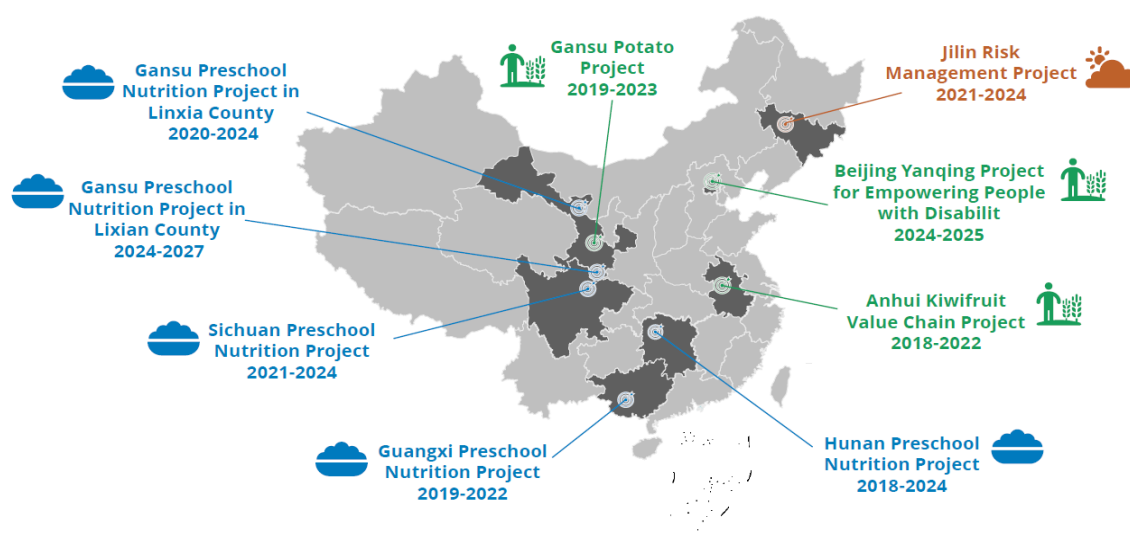
⁶³ WFP China CSP 2022-2025.

⁶⁴ KII with WFP staff, June 2024. WFP China CSP 2022-2025.

However, China's vast geography and population means that in practice most activities operate as standalone projects.

Figure 7: Map of WFP domestic programmes

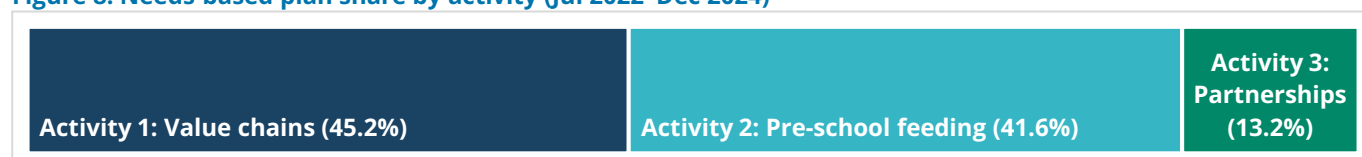
Footprint of Domestic Programme



Source: WFP China country office, shared with the evaluation team on 3 June 2024

41. **Funding:** The CSP began with a projected total budget of USD 15,652,925 and was not subject to any budget revisions between July 2022 and December 2024. Preschool feeding (Act 2) and value chains (Act 1) were allocated the largest shares (45 percent and 42 percent) of the needs-based plan, with 13 percent for partnerships (Act 3) (Figure 8). As of 31 December 2024, the CSP implementation plan was 108.7 percent funded (Table 3), though WFP China appears to be tracking well below the target of USD 15.7 million raised by end 2025 outlined in the CSP.⁶⁵

Figure 8: Needs-based plan share by activity (Jul 2022–Dec 2024)



Source: Cumulative financial overview as at 31 December 2024 (CN02), data extracted on 18 April 2025

Table 3: Allocated resources as a percentage of implementation plan (USD) by activity (July 2022 to Dec 2024)

Strategic outcome	Activity	Implementation plan (USD)	Allocated resources (USD)	Allocated resources as % of implementation plan
SO1	Act 1: Value chains	2,218,999	2,235,262	100.7%
	Act 2: Preschool feeding	2,625,076	2,708,992	103.2%
	Act 3: Partnerships	1,047,533	1,457,707	139.2%
	TOTAL	5,891,608	6,401,960	108.7%

Source: Cumulative financial overview as at 31 December 2024 (CN02), data extracted on 18 April 2025

⁶⁵ WFP China CSP 2022-2025.

Donor contributions and earmarking: WFP work in China under the CSP has been fully funded by the Government of China and private donors (Table 4). Funding is highly flexible, with less than 3 percent earmarked to the activity level (see Figure 18).

Table 4: WFP China donor contributions (USD) (2021 to 2024)

	2021 (USD)	2022 (USD)	2023 (USD)	2024 (USD)	Total (USD)
Government of China	1,256,372	1,349,098	1,489,801	1,487,817	5,583,089
Private Donors	2,628,663	679,105	279,968	220,132	3,807,868
UN Other Funds and Agencies (excl. CERF)	200,000				200,000
Grand Total	4,085,035	2,028,203	1,769,769	1,707,949	9,590,957

Source: Annual distribution contribution and forecast, data extracted on 30 September 2024.

42. **Delivery modalities:** The China CSP is entirely delivered through country capacity strengthening. There are no cash-based transfers or food distributions (see capacity strengthening above). To the end of 2024, WFP provided direct capacity strengthening (training or mentoring) for 1,397 people under the CSP (Table 5). WFP achieved or exceeded its output targets each year, except for the first half of 2022, where WFP fell short of targets for the number of nutrition and livelihoods capacity strengthening initiatives due to COVID-19 (Table 11, Table 12). Under outcomes, WFP reports on the number of government programmes it supports. WFP supported six programmes throughout the CSP period (three preschool feeding (Act 2), three value chains (Act 1). The number of value chain programmes supported reduced to one in 2023 due to the end of the Anhui kiwi value chain project, but increased again to two in 2024 with the launch of the Yanqing disability project. Two of the three preschool feeding projects concluded at the end of 2023 (Table 6, Figure 7).⁶⁶

Table 5: CSP outputs relevant to country capacity strengthening

Output indicator	Activity	2022 Jul to Dec			2023			2024		
		Planned	Actual	% of plan achieved	Planned	Actual	% of plan achieved	Planned	Actual	% of plan achieved
C.4*: Number of people engaged in capacity strengthening initiatives facilitated by WFP to enhance national food security and nutrition stakeholder capacities (new) (individuals)	Act 1: Value chains	10	12	120%	151	151	100%	40	40	100%
	Act 2: Preschool feeding	80	90	112%	68	68	100%	40	1,036	259%

Source: ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to Jun, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, ACR 2024, data extracted on 20 June 2024 and 20 April 2025

Table 6: Outcome indicator summary

Outcome indicator	Activity	Baseline 2022	2022 Follow-up	2023 Follow-up	2024 Follow-up
Number of national food security and nutrition policies, programmes and system components enhanced as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new)	Act 1: Value chains	2	2	1	2
	Act 2: Preschool feeding	3	3	3	1

Source: ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, ACR 2024, data extracted on 20 June 2024 and 20 April 2025

⁶⁶ WFP China. 3 June 2024. Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025). KILs with WFP staff, June 2024.

43. **Beneficiaries:** As all of WFP support in China is delivered through government systems, WFP China does not have any Tier 1 (direct) beneficiaries. The CSP has an estimated 49,700 Tier 2 beneficiaries, including children and smallholder farmers who are planned to benefit from assets and services, including social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) and individual capacity strengthening. The CSP also estimates that a population of 850,000 to 1,290,000 will benefit indirectly from WFP technical assistance, nutrition messaging and advocacy through innovative social media (Tier 3).⁶⁷ Further details on beneficiaries are at EQ 2.1.

44. The government counterparts are not considered “beneficiaries” as they are implementation partners. For the CSP, the counterparts include agencies and technical institutions, which WFP aims to empower, including provincial Directorates of Agriculture, Education, Health and academic institutions, through advice and assistance, advocacy and support for policies, systems and national programmes. They are included in the CSP monitoring under indicator C.4 (Table 5).

1.4 Evaluation methodology, limitations and ethical considerations

Methodology

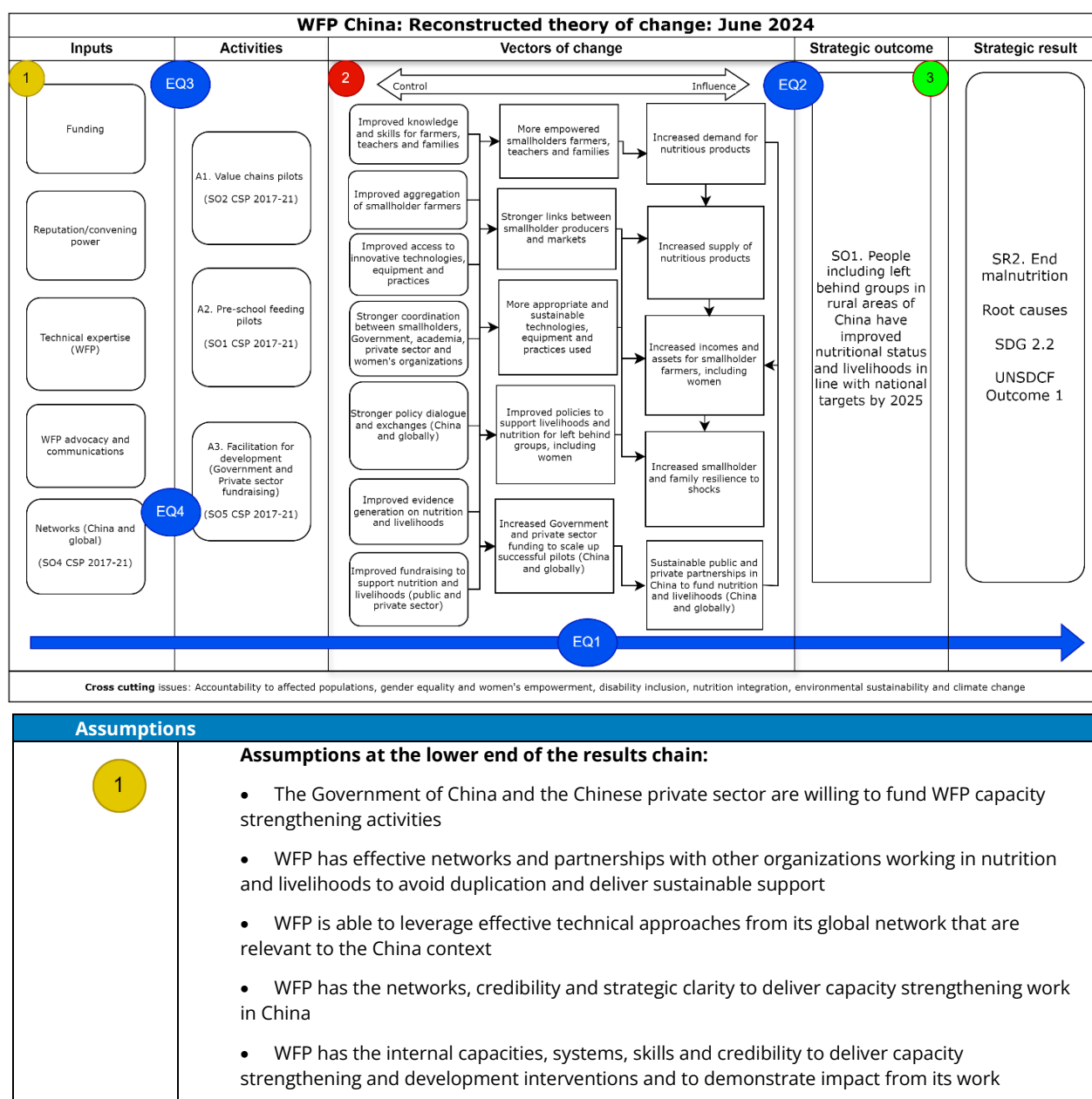
45. The evaluation is oriented around four principal evaluation questions (EQs) (Annex 1) covering the relevance of the approach by WFP to addressing the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity in rural and underdeveloped areas in China, the effectiveness and efficiency of its approach and the key factors that explain its performance and results (both positive and negative).

46. The methodology for this evaluation followed a theory-based, mixed methods approach based on the reconstructed CSP theory of change developed during the inception phase through an evaluation team-facilitated participatory process with the country office (see Figure 9). The evaluation team developed an evaluation matrix to identify specific lines of enquiry and indicators to address the evaluation questions and to provide a consistent approach to data collection and analysis (Annex 2). The evaluation team used a manual structured format to map findings against evaluation questions, then analysed the data using contribution analysis, political economy analysis and triangulation and validation to test evidence and assess the extent to which WFP actions could plausibly have contributed to the observed vectors of change mapped out in the theory of change (ToC) and capacity strengthening framework (Figure 9). Further details are in Annex 4. The evaluation team interviewed 262 people, including 82 project beneficiaries, during two visits to China between June to September 2024 (details below and in Annex 5). To assess capacity strengthening progress, the evaluation team reconstructed a capacity strengthening framework during the inception phase based on WFP’s five pathways for capacity change.

47. **Gender, equity and inclusion:** The evaluation applied the Office of Evaluation’s Technical Note on Integrating Gender in WFP Evaluations and the Evaluation Performance Indicator of the United Nations System-Wide Action Plan (UN SWAP) to mainstream gender throughout the evaluation. It utilized an inclusive and participatory methodology to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations were integrated into the evaluation. The evaluation matrix and data collection tools integrate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and human rights commitments as well as questions as to how well the CSP aligned to the WFP Gender Action Plan (GAP). Analysis included age and diversity disaggregation as appropriate.

⁶⁷ WFP China CSP 2022-2025.

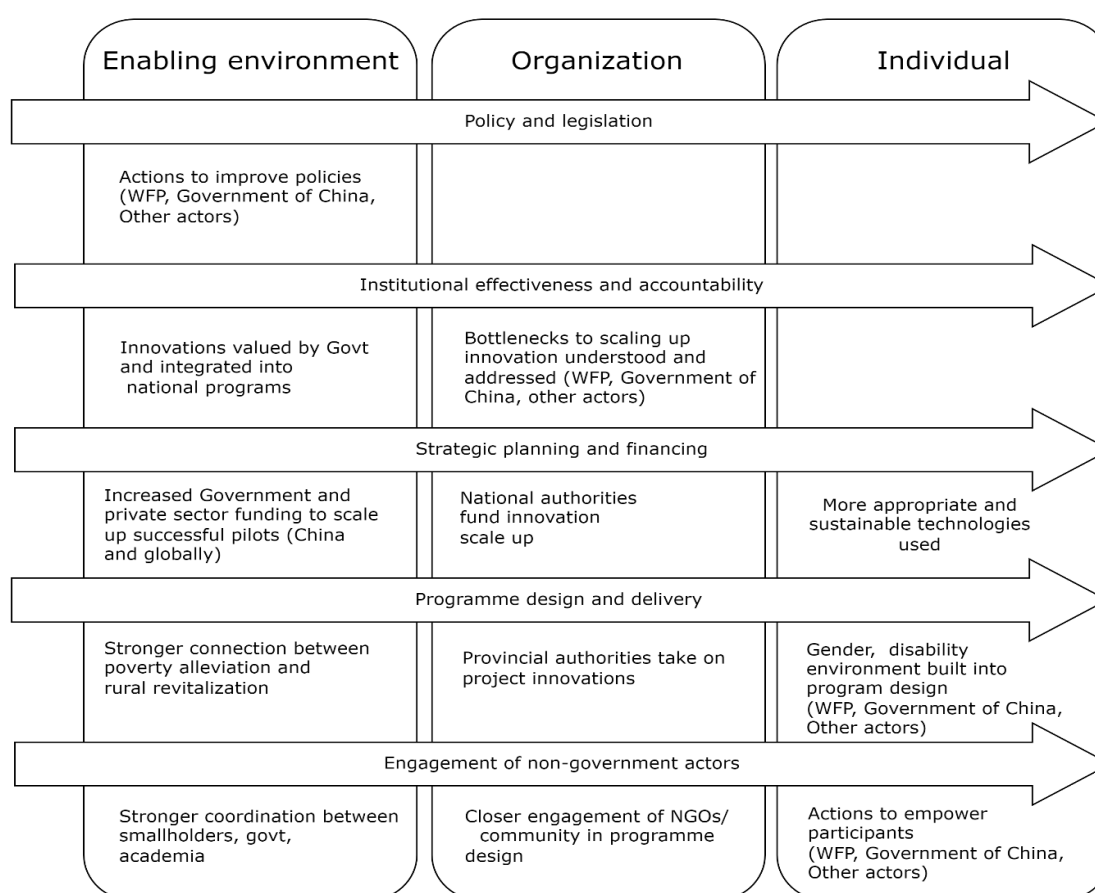
Figure 9: Reconstructed theory of change and assumptions



Assumptions	
2	<p>Assumptions at middle level of the results chain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WFP is able to identify gaps in knowledge, attitudes and practice and design and deliver quality training, technologies, approaches and equipment to address those gaps • WFP is able to identify new innovative, technologies, approaches and equipment that are suitable for local conditions and sustainable from a financial, social and economic perspective • Smallholder farmers and communities are open to adapting new approaches and technologies • Aggregation of farmers improves purchasing power and incomes for farmers • New knowledge, technologies, approaches and equipment are accessible and relevant to women, people with disability and marginalized groups • WFP is able to generate, document and disseminate solid evidence from pilot projects • The Government of China and the private sector are willing and able to scale up successful pilots • Project participants are willing and able to provide open feedback on project successes, weaknesses and opportunities to improve • Stakeholders (the Government, private sector, academia, WFP) are open to learn and adapt their approach based on international and local lessons and project results
3	<p>Assumptions at higher level of the results chain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WFP and the Government of China are able to identify and prioritize left-behind groups in rural areas of China in need of nutrition and livelihoods support • Gains from increased livelihoods and nutrition interventions are not offset or eroded by economic or environmental shocks or crises • Government, communities and left-behind groups are able to sustain projects after the end of WFP interventions • The Government of China and Chinese businesses are willing and able to fund global efforts to end malnutrition • Lessons generated from the WFP China CSP can be successfully leveraged and applied to global efforts to improve nutrition and livelihoods

Source: Evaluation team, drawing on an in-country workshop to map vectors of change and assumptions, June 2024

Figure 10: Reconstructed capacity strengthening framework



Source: Evaluation team based on the pathways for capacity change in the WFP Country Capacity Strengthening policy update (June 2022)

48. The inception mission in Beijing (3 to 7 June 2024) interviewed 24 people (15 women, 9 men) from the WFP China country office, headquarters (remotely), the Government, the private sector and foundations. The evaluation team conducted a workshop on 7 June 2024 with 15 members of the WFP China country office (10 women, 5 men) to test and refine the vectors of change and assumptions underpinning the reconstructed theory of change (see Figure 9) ahead of the data collection phase.

49. The evaluation team collected data between 26 August and 9 September 2024 in five of the seven governorates supported by WFP capacity strengthening: Beijing, Gansu, Jilin, Hunan and Anhui (remote).⁶⁸

50. Overall, the evaluation team engaged with **238 people** as part of data collection activities: 128 women, 96 men, 9 girls and 5 boys.

Figure 11: Summary of data collection

Document review	Reviewed over 100 WFP and development partner reports. Analysed WFP programme and financial data
Key informant interviews	49 KIIs with 156 people (84 women, 72 men), including government officials (national and provincial), UN agencies, private sector, school officials, academic partners and WFP

⁶⁸ Anhui project closed in 2022, so the ET agreed to remote interviews to minimize the burden on the local authorities.

Focus group discussions	10 FGDs with 82 people (5 girls, 9 boys, 44 women, 24 men), including smallholder farmers, children, parents or caregivers and teachers
Site visits	Site visits to preschool feeding and value chain projects in Beijing, Gansu, Jilin and Hunan

Source: Evaluation team

51. The sampling plan addressed the diversity of stakeholders to ensure a strong representation of voices from women, girls, ethnic minority groups, the elderly, people with disability and organizations of people with disability. Data collection tools were tested and validated by the evaluation team's national experts, who have strong experience in gender-sensitive nutrition and value chains in China. Data collection tools are included in Annex 6. The detailed analysis of WFP and country office supplied data on resourcing, expenditures, transfers, indicators and implementation (and the CSP line of sight) is found in Annex 7. Documentation, including previous evaluations and reviews, was also shared with the evaluation team (Annex 8).

52. The evaluation team held an exit debriefing with 25 members of the WFP country office (15 women, 10 men) in Beijing on 9 September 2024 to present early impressions and emerging themes from the data collection mission for validation and discussion. The evaluation timeline and fieldwork agenda are in Annexes 9 and 10.

53. All findings were developed based on triangulation from multiple sources including cross-referenced document review, interviews, focus group discussions, observations and primary or secondary quantitative data. The evaluation team used a central data tool to collate findings, assess the strength of evidence against each finding and identify gaps in evidence. The evaluation team conducted three analysis workshops to jointly interrogate, test and develop findings and recommendations (Annex 11). The team applied a gender lens to the analysis, considering the different outcomes and experience of the interventions to ensure that equal weight was given to evidence from women, men, girls, boys, people with disability, the elderly and people from ethnic minorities. No single source findings are presented. However, in some instances, a specific source is cited to reinforce a pattern.

Limitations

54. The evaluation faced minor challenges that were successfully mitigated. Farmers were not comfortable speaking in a focus group discussion setting so the evaluation switched to a farm visits model. One evaluator participated remotely due to scheduling challenges and there was lack of gender balance on the evaluation team. However, the team adapted. The woman research analyst joined the data collection mission, and the data collection exceeded the original plan (see Annex 8). The evidence available provides a solid foundation to justify the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this report.

Ethical considerations

55. Gender considerations, and principles of inclusion, participation and non-discrimination were included in the design, questioning, data collection and reporting in line with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Guidance on Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation. The evaluation was conducted according to the 2020 UNEG Ethical Guidelines. Having signed the Pledge of Ethical Conduct, the evaluation team ensured ethical standards were adhered to throughout the evaluation through detailed protocols for interviews and field visits (Annex 6).

56. The evaluation team ensured informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, do no harm principles and fair treatment of different groups. The team included a mix of national and international staff, including evaluators who are familiar with the country context. Data protection measures included storage on password-protected computers and anonymization prior to analysis. Data will be deleted upon acceptance of the final report to further protect individuals.

2. Evaluation findings

2.1 EQ 1: To what extent is the CSP evidence-based and strategically focused to address the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity of the most vulnerable people in rural and underdeveloped areas in China?

EQ 1.1 To what extent and how was the design of the CSP informed by credible evidence (including by the evaluation of the previous CSP as relevant) and strategically and realistically targeted to address the nutrition status and livelihoods of the key vulnerable groups in rural areas of China in line with WFP-Government of China agreements?

Key finding 1: The WFP CSP has appropriately focused on strategically addressing the root causes of food insecurity in China. This was done through livelihood and nutrition interventions, targeting provinces prioritized by the Government due to their high levels of poverty and targeting key vulnerable groups, particularly left-behind children and smallholder farmers. This approach closely aligned with China's development efforts, both at the national and provincial levels, and with UNSDCF priorities.

57. The CSP 2022-2025 provides an enabling framework for WFP and China to collaborate on innovative approaches to improve the nutrition of preschool children and address rural vulnerability in previous poverty counties of rural China.⁶⁹ These activities in the provinces were also intended to strengthen the WFP-China partnership, generating lessons for global efforts to reduce hunger (SDG 2) and facilitating fundraising and partnerships with private and public institutions in China to support domestic and international programmes.

58. The CSP focused on small-scale innovative pilots with the intention that the Government of China would integrate successes into national programmes to achieve scale. This strategy is realistic in the context of massive Chinese investment in poverty alleviation and rural revitalization over the past decade but relies on the ability of WFP to generate credible evidence to influence national planning, an area where WFP has had mixed success (See EQ 4.3).⁷⁰

Evidence base

59. The design of the WFP China CSPE 2022-2025 drew on the organization's long history of collaboration in China dating back to 1979, government priorities as set out in the memorandum of understanding signed with China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs in 2016, a Zero Hunger Strategic Review in 2015, a 2021 evaluation of the previous country strategic plan and a 2022 decentralized evaluation of the preschool feeding approach.⁷¹

60. The CSP 2022-2025 introduced a number of changes based on these evidence sources, including a more ambitious approach to gender transformation, in line with the WFP Gender Policy 2022, an increased focus on evidence-driven, country-owned approaches in line with the WFP China Strategic Plan (2022-2025) and its 2021 evaluation, an increased focus on evidence generation to better disseminate lessons and

⁶⁹ China announced that it had eliminated extreme poverty in 2020, marking a shift in focus from poverty elimination, including massive investment in infrastructure, housing and services in poverty counties, to rural revitalization, which focuses on sustaining food security gains, avoiding a large-scale return to poverty and enhancing rural construction and governance. Xinhua. China's No. 1 central document for 2024 charts roadmap for rural revitalization, 3 February 2024. Kakwani, N., Wang, X., Xue, N., & Zhan, P. (2022). Growth and common prosperity in China. *China & World Economy*, 30(1), 28-57; Wang, G., Shi, X., & Golley, J. (2024). Feed the children, free the women? Evidence from the China rural nutrition improvement programme. *China Economic Review*, 102228.

⁷⁰ WFP China CSP 2022-2025. Reconstructed theory of change developed by the evaluation team in June 2024, see Figure 9. Kills with WFP staff, the Government of China, UN and private sector partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

⁷¹ China. 2015. Zero Hunger Strategic Review. WFP China CSPE 2017-2021.

successes from the WFP approach and a greater focus on working with local academic experts and caregivers to tailor approaches under the preschool feeding programme to the local context.⁷²

61. The selection of provinces to work in was based on China's national priorities set out under the poverty alleviation and rural revitalization agenda and negotiated with national ministries. Site visits and interviews with local academia and programme beneficiaries found that these provinces also contained a very large proportion of vulnerable groups, including smallholder farmers and left-behind groups, in line with the WFP strategy.⁷³ WFP developed its own targeting policy in 2022, which it used to influence beneficiary selection, including advocating for the inclusion of women and people with disabilities, within the targeted provinces (EQ 3.2).

Alignment

62. CSP strategic outcomes and activities are highly aligned to China's national and subnational priorities. The focus by WFP on children aged 3 to 5 fills a gap in national policies, including the 2024 child nutrition plan, which provides large-scale support to primary schoolchildren, pregnant women and children aged 0 to 24 months.⁷⁴ Addressing food security and poverty is a key focus of China's domestic and international development approaches (Table 7).

Table 7: CSP alignment with national policies and plans

CSP Activity	National plans/policies	Areas of alignment
Act 1: Value chains	2024 Central No. 1 Document emphasizes constructing a modern agricultural management system, with a particular focus on smallholder farmers 14th Five-Year-Plan for Economic and Social Development (2021-2025) Poverty alleviation campaign (2015 to 2020) Rural revitalization (2017 to ongoing)	Common focus on food security and nutrition in rural areas, addressing urban-rural income inequality Focus on environmentally sustainable, gender and disability inclusive development
Act 2: Preschool feeding	China National Nutrition Plan 2024 Outline on the Development of Chinese Children (2021-2030) Nutrition Healthy Village approach	Shared focus on childhood nutrition and obesity WFP focus on children aged 3-5 addresses a gap in national policies
Act 3: Partnerships	Global Development Initiative (launched 2022, ongoing) Forum on China Africa Cooperation	Ending poverty and hunger is a key focus of China's international cooperation (EQ 4.1)

Source: Evaluation team




⁷² The previous CSP 2017-2021 focused on gender inclusion and disaggregating data. WFP Strategic Plan 2022-2025. WFP China CSPE 2017-2021. WFP Gender Policy 2022. Decentralized Evaluation Report for the Impact Evaluation of the Preschool Nutrition Pilot in Selected Counties of Xiangxi Prefecture, Hunan, PR China. Available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/china-preschool-nutrition-pilot-selected-countries-china-feb-2018-jan-2021-evaluation-baseli>.

⁷³ KII with Government of China, UN, academia and WFP staff, Aug to Sept 2024. FGD with farmers and preschool feeding beneficiaries, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP CSP 2022-2025. WFP China. Targeting Strategy for China CSP (2022 – 2025). December 2022.

⁷⁴ Decentralized Evaluation Report for the Impact Evaluation of the Preschool Nutrition Pilot in Selected Counties of Xiangxi Prefecture, Hunan, PR China. Available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/china-preschool-nutrition-pilot-selected-countries-china-feb-2018-jan-2021-evaluation-baseli>. Promotion Plan of National Drinking Milk Programme for Students (2021-2025). KII with Government of China, UN, academia and WFP staff, Aug to Sept 2024.

63. The WFP CSP 2022-2025 directly contributes to three of the six UNSDCF outcomes: Outcome 1 – poverty reduction; Outcome 2 – improved access to health services (including a target to reduce malnutrition and obesity among children under 5), and Outcome 5 – finance for global SDG attainment. WFP also integrates environmental impact into its CSP and programmes as a cross-cutting issue, further contributing to UNSDCF Outcome 3. The South-South cooperation by WFP directly contributes to UNSDCF Outcome 6, but this sits outside of the current CSP 2022-2025 (Table 8).

Table 8: CSP alignment with UNSDCF

	Priority	WFP alignment
	Priority I: People and prosperity Outcome 1: Reduced poverty and urban-rural inequality Outcome 2: Equitable access to quality public services (including nutrition), social protection and gender equality, including for left behind groups	Act 1: Value chains: Contributes to UNSDCF Outcome 1 by promoting livelihoods for people in rural areas Activity 2: Preschool feeding contributes to the nutrition focus of UNSDCF Outcome 2, with a particular focus on left behind children
	Priority II: Planet: Achieving green development Outcome 3: Healthier and more resilient environment Outcome 4: Transition to low carbon, and circular economy	WFP integrates environmental impact into its strategy as a cross-cutting issues (UNSDCF Outcome 3)
	Priority III: Partnerships to achieve the SDGs across the world Outcome 5: Financing Outcome 6: South-South cooperation	Act 3: Government and private partnerships: Contributes to UNSDCF Outcome 5 by raising funding from the Chinese Government and private sector towards SDG 2 – zero hunger in partner countries WFP's South-South (outside the CSP) aligns with contributes to UNSDCF Outcome 6

Source: Evaluation team based on UNSDCF China 2022-2025

EQ 1.2 To what extent and how is the CSP design internally coherent (between activity types and links to other WFP cooperation within the framework of the memorandum of understanding (including the Centre of Excellence) and based on a clear theory of change with realistic assumptions?

Key finding 2: WFP China has carved out a comparative advantage in nutrition for children aged 3 to 5 years and nutrition-sensitive value chains, although its added value in traditional value chains compared to other United Nations agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) was less clear. The division between the Centre of Excellence and the CSP from 2022 onwards resulted in missed opportunities to leverage synergies between domestic and international projects - for example, in preschool feeding, where much evidence has been generated by the project but then not showcased through the Centre of Excellence. The wide geographic spread made it difficult to achieve consistent synergies across CSP projects.

Coherent strategic logic

64. **WFP China's activities contribute to a coherent strategic logic that is clearly outlined in the CSP.** Activity 1 (value chains) and Activity 2 (preschool feeding) directly contribute to “improving the nutritional status and livelihoods of left-behind groups in rural China”, with Activity 1 supporting preschool children and Activity 2 focusing on smallholder farmers, including women and the elderly. The focus by WFP on children aged 3 to 5 years meets a clear gap in national programmes to address child nutrition (see EQ 1.1). Activity 3 contributes to sustainable public and private partnerships to fund nutrition and livelihoods, facilitating funding and access to innovation to strengthen nutrition and livelihoods both inside China and

globally.⁷⁵ WFP China's commitment to gender-transformative and disability-inclusive country capacity strengthening aligns closely with the WFP "changing lives" agenda and the goal of working through country-level systems in upper middle-income contexts.⁷⁶ Although WFP China reports to headquarters, not the regional bureau in Bangkok, its country capacity strengthening approach aligns with other capacity-focused programmes across Asia.⁷⁷

Synergies across activities

65. WFP China has made some progress in achieving synergies across activities, but the geographic dispersion of projects meant that these links were often one-off or ad hoc.⁷⁸ WFP integrated support for smallholder farmers under its nutrition programme, helping to establish supply chains for small farmers to provide vegetables to schools and central kitchens. However, these relationships did not always continue after the end of WFP support (see EQ 2.1 Activity 2).⁷⁹ For example, one private sector partner supported a one-off purchase of zinc-enriched potatoes produced under Activity 1 for the local preschool feeding programme.⁸⁰

66. The decision to split the Centre of Excellence for Enhancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation out of the CSP in 2022 contributed to missed opportunities for synergies. For example, there are no policy briefings on the WFP preschool feeding approach on the South-South cooperation knowledge-sharing platform, only two brief case studies, despite significant WFP investment.⁸¹ WFP staff and partners saw potential to increase synergies between domestic and international programmes, with small-scale innovative domestic pilots contributing to learning on global nutrition and food security approaches while deepening communication and partnerships with the Chinese government.⁸²

Complementarity with other key development actors, including other United Nations agencies

67. **The focus by WFP on nutrition-sensitive value chains complements the approach of other United Nations agencies.** For example, WFP has leveraged the focus by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on supporting national nutrition programmes to ensure a coherent approach to nutrition interventions in the WFP-supported preschool feeding programmes in the provinces. UNICEF reported strong collaboration with WFP on nutrition approaches.⁸³ FAO and IFAD also noted the particular advantage of WFP in supporting nutrition-sensitive value chains, which complements the focus by FAO on agricultural policy and technical support and the focus by IFAD on rural technology and value chains. WFP, IFAD and FAO were also increasingly working together on specific policy initiatives such as the rice value chain.

⁷⁵ WFP China. CSP 2022-2025. Evaluation Team. Reconstructed Theory of Change. Consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation and effectively connecting with rural revitalization. *Journal of Nanjing Agricultural University (Social Sciences Edition)*. 21.06(2021):54-61. doi:10.19714/j.cnki.1671-7465.20210622.002.

⁷⁶ Outcome 4 of WFP Strategic Plan 2022-2025. WFP China. CSP 2022-2025. Evaluation Team. Reconstructed Theory of Change. June 2024. KII with WFP staff, UN partners. Aug and Sept 2024. For a discussion of the effectiveness of the WFP gender approach, see EQ 2.4.

⁷⁷ The decision for WFP China to report to headquarters is partly historical, the China programme was re-established in 2015 through direct engagement of WFP Rome and partly reflects China's increasing importance as a donor in its own right. KIIs with WFP headquarters staff and Government of China, June, Aug and Sept 2024. Sophie Dunn, Gerardo Sanchis Munoz and Belinda Chanda. Review: WFP's Capacity Strengthening Support to National Systems and Actors: Asia and the Pacific, March 2024. Country Capacity Strengthening framework developed by the Evaluation Team, 14 August 2024.

⁷⁸ Site visit observations. KIIs with WFP staff, project management units (PMUs), Government of China. Aug to Sept 2024.

⁷⁹ KIIs with PMOs, private sector partners, WFP staff site visits to central kitchens and preschool feeding projects, Sept to Oct 2024. ACR 2021, 2022, 2023.

⁸⁰ KIIs with PMO, WFP staff, Government of China, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP ACR 2023.

⁸¹ The Zinc-enriched potato and Kiwi value chain projects are showcased on the South-South cooperation platform. KII with WFP staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China. South-South Cooperation Knowledge Sharing, <http://www.wfpchinacoe.net/>, accessed 18 October 2024. WFP. China Evaluation Actions, 19 June 2024.

⁸² KII with WFP staff, Aug to Sept 2024. Government of China, UN partners. WFP China. South-South Cooperation Knowledge Sharing, <http://www.wfpchinacoe.net/>, accessed 18 October 2024. WFP China, CSP 2022-2025. WFP China, ACR 2021, 2022, 2023.

⁸³ KII with UN partners and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024. WFP China ACRs 2021, 2022, 2023.

However, United Nations partners were less convinced of the added value of traditional WFP value chains projects, as IFAD and FAO also invest heavily in these areas (see EQ 4.2).⁸⁴

EQ 1.3 To what extent and how did the CSP adapt to respond to any contextual changes and to any requests from key stakeholders, if applicable?

Key finding 3: WFP China's approach remained relevant as China transitioned from a focus on poverty alleviation to rural revitalization. WFP provided valued support at the provincial level, helping partners strengthen the links between poverty alleviation and rural revitalization. However, WFP was not always able to leverage these insights to influence the policy debate at the national level. WFP responded flexibly to the changing context during the COVID-19 pandemic and major shifts in the private fundraising space.

Relevance of WFP support to China's rural revitalization agenda

68. In 2020, China announced that it had eradicated extreme poverty in rural areas, shifting its attention to the rural revitalization agenda in order to consolidate poverty alleviation gains, modernize agricultural production and improve farmers' incomes. WFP capacity strengthening on nutrition and value chains remained relevant throughout this transition, supporting local governments to pilot new approaches that address discrepancies in nutrition education. This contributed to the development of approaches that aim to close the gap between rural and urban incomes and support local government to effectively identify vulnerable people and integrate them into national and provincial programmes. This in turn made a meaningful contribution to consolidating and protecting poverty-alleviation gains in the previous poverty counties that WFP was supporting, although the small scale of WFP interventions meant that there was not yet evidence of impact on the broader national approach to rural revitalization (see EQ 3.2 for WFP contribution to rural revitalization and 4.3 for a discussion of the barriers to taking pilots to scale).⁸⁵

Flexibility

69. WFP adapted rapidly and flexibly to a major upheaval in the private fundraising sector, including an economic slowdown and geostrategic shifts that led to a sharp drop in company donations after 2021. WFP adapted by pursuing new approaches (individual giving), new partners (China Red Cross) and new locations (Hong Kong registration). However, weak integration with the WFP fundraising teams in headquarters and a lack of systems to track return on investment from private fundraising means that WFP China currently does not have data on its return on investment for different private fundraising streams (see EQ 2.1, Activity 3). In August 2024, WFP headquarters funded a visit to Rome for WFP China's private fundraising team, which identified opportunities for greater collaboration and integration, though it is too early to assess the effect of this collaboration.⁸⁶

70. WFP adapted well to the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting provincial governments to provide take-home meals to continue the preschool feeding programme (Activity 2), and organizing online field visits to Ethiopia and Guinea for senior officials in CIDCA, CICETE and MARA to build understanding of the WFP approach to zero hunger. Provincial government project management offices were able to maintain most activities during COVID-19, except for the risk insurance component of the Jilin corn value chain project, which was delayed for a year (see EQ 3.1).⁸⁷

71. WFP also introduced several innovations during COVID-19 to maintain its own operations, including using Alipay for transfers and opening a bank account with the Bank of China, enabling WFP to make payments to Chinese partners through the local banking system. Previously, all funding was managed

⁸⁴ KII with UN partners, WFP China and Headquarters staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP COE. Seminar on China-Africa Rice Value Chain. 8 July 2024, http://www.wfpchinacoe.net/2024-07/08/content_117296386.shtml.

⁸⁵ KII with Government of China, private sector, academia, PMOs and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. HUANG Zuhui, QIAN Zesen. Consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation and effectively connecting with rural revitalization. *Journal of Nanjing Agricultural University (Social Sciences Edition)*.21.06(2021):54-61. doi:10.19714/j.cnki.1671-7465.20210622.002. WFP China CSP 2022-2025.

⁸⁶ KII, WFP China staff, headquarters staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China Partnership Action Plan.

⁸⁷ KII with WFP China staff, Government of China, PMOs, academic partners Aug to Sept 2024. FGDs with school feeding parents, teachers and principals, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China ACRs 2021, 2022, 2023. WFP China Mission Report, Jilin, April 2023.

offshore. These measures remained in place after the pandemic, contributing to improved operating efficiency (EQ 3.3).⁸⁸

2.2 EQ 2: What difference did the WFP CSP make to food security and nutrition in rural and underdeveloped areas in China?

EQ 2.1 To what extent and how did WFP achieve its CSP outcome targets particularly with regard to the integration of smallholder farmers into nutrition-sensitive value chains; and the extension of nutrition-sensitive school feeding programmes to national stakeholders? Were there any unintended outcomes, positive or negative?

Key finding 4: WFP made progress supporting capacities at the provincial level to improve nutrition and livelihoods, integrating smallholder farmers into nutrition-sensitive value chains, increasing income, especially for women, and increasing children's nutritional status and knowledge. Preschool feeding programmes reduced wasting and stunting but unintentionally contributed to obesity and dental caries. WFP and provincial project implementation offices learned and improved over time, achieving better results in phase II activities due to stronger local engagement. However, methodological gaps meant that the evidence generated did not always reflect the extent of progress. WFP-supported value chains projects demonstrated mixed uptake, with further work needed on market linkages and risk insurance to develop scalable approaches. WFP supported provincial capacities in project planning and monitoring, but did not give sufficient focus to evidence and engagement at the national level to support scale-up.

72. **Overall summary:** WFP made some progress towards its overall goal of supporting provincial capacity to improve the nutrition status and livelihoods of people in rural areas, including left-behind areas, by 2025 (Table 9). WFP China achieved or exceeded its capacity strengthening output targets in 2021, the second half of 2022 and 2023 and 2024, falling short only in the first half of 2022 because of COVID-19 (Table 11 and Table 12). Although WFP China increased its project-level monitoring, in line with the recommendations of the 2021 CSPE, its monitoring approach was very focused on domestic Chinese priorities and did not align well with WFP corporate indicators and the targets set out in the CSP. As a result, the country office did not report on corporate outcome targets and there are gaps in outcome data, especially for 2023 (see Table 13). However, site visits, interviews with provincial implementing partners and project-level data showed that the WFP-supported preschool feeding intervention (Activity 2) helped to reduce wasting and stunting but contributed to unintended increases in overweight and obese children and dental cavities among pilot areas, particularly in the first phase of programmes (see Activity 2 below).⁸⁹

73. Evidence was mixed for value chains interventions (Activity 1). WFP-supported zinc-enriched potato varieties and improved post-harvest storage technologies introduced to Gansu province saw considerable local uptake in Dongxiang county, but not in Anding, largely due to the different capacities of local cooperatives. Innovative fertiliser and irrigation (fertigation) techniques supported in Jilin showed strong results, but the related income insurance component was a complicated system, which farmers would need ongoing support to fully understand and integrate into their day-to-day work. The risk insurance would need further work to develop into a scalable model. Provincial authorities, cooperatives and beneficiaries across all value chain projects reported the need to strengthen branding and market linkages for smallholder farmers.⁹⁰ WFP maintained its relationships with the Government of China and the private sector (Activity 3), but economic volatility, geopolitical shifts that caused some companies to move their

⁸⁸ KII with WFP China staff, Aug and Sept 2024. WFP China Risk Register, Plans and Mid-Year Reviews 2022, 2023. WFP Chain Annual Programme Plans and End Year Reviews 2022 and 2023.

⁸⁹ FGDs with children, caregivers and teachers, Aug to Sept 2024. Site visits to Act 2 projects, Aug to Sept 2024. KIIs with PMOs, cooperatives, private sector and academia, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team assessment of Act 2 progress reports, baseline, midline and endline evaluations, 2021 to 2024 and mission reports, Sep 2021 to Apr 2024. Decentralized Evaluation Report for the Impact Evaluation of the Preschool Nutrition Pilot in Selected Counties of Xiangxi Prefecture, Hunan, PR China. Available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/china-preschool-nutrition-pilot-selected-counties-china-feb-2018-jan-2021-evaluation-baseli>.

⁹⁰ FGDs with smallholder farmers, Aug to Sept 2024. Site visits to Act 1 projects, Aug to Sept 2024. KIIs with PMOs, cooperatives, private sector and academia, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team assessment of Act 1 progress reports, baseline, midline and endline evaluations, 2021 to 2024 and mission reports, Sep 2021 to Apr 2024.

operations outside of China, restrictions on the ability of WFP to fundraise directly in China and the USD 2 million cap on Government of China humanitarian grants to UN agencies made it challenging to significantly expand fundraising. Though the cap was increased to USD 4 million in early 2025, highlighting the scope for negotiation.⁹¹

Table 9: CSP progress towards outputs and outcomes

Strategic outcome/activity	Output progress	Outcome progress	Likelihood of achieving end of CSP outcomes - ET assessment
SO1: People including left-behind groups in rural areas of China have improved nutrition status and livelihoods in line with national targets by 2025	N/A	Some progress	Improved livelihoods and nutrition capacities at the provincial level, but limited evidence of national uptake
Act 1: Smallholder farmers and other rural populations benefit from more resilient, nutrition-sensitive value chains and improved livelihoods that improve nutrition status in rural areas	Significant progress	Mixed progress	Mixed evidence of uptake of new innovations. Further work needed on market linkages and risk insurance to develop scalable approaches
Act 2: Rural preschool children benefit from improved capacity of national actors to extend and implement existing nutrition-sensitive school feeding programmes in order to reduce rural-urban nutritional disparities	Significant progress	Significant progress	Good evidence of improved nutrition knowledge and status, but unintentional increases in obesity and dental caries
Act 3: Malnourished and food-insecure populations benefit from enhanced strategic, public and private partnerships aimed at achieving SDG 2	N/A	Some progress	Some progress strengthening partnerships, but potential to expand both private and public fundraising

Source: Evaluation team assessment

74. **Evidence and learning:** WFP increased its investment in project-level evaluations, in line with recommendations from the previous CSP evaluation.⁹² However, methodological issues, including problems with selection of intervention and comparison schools and spillover effect, meant that the evaluations may have underreported impact in some cases. The evaluation team saw evidence of learning and adaptation. For example, phase 2 nutrition programmes performed better on obesity than Phase I (Table 16). However, WFP China lacks a clearly articulated strategy to identify bottle necks in scaling up nutrition and value chain pilots, including understanding the gaps in current evidence, who needs evidence, what evidence decision-makers need, and how to most effectively deliver evidence for impact. As a result, while WFP China produces a lot of evidence, it is not always well targeted to encourage scale-up of pilots into national programmes (EQ 4.3).⁹³

75. **Beneficiary achievement:** Since all of WFP support in China is delivered through government systems, WFP China does not have any Tier 1 beneficiaries. WFP therefore does not set annual beneficiary targets. However, it does report on beneficiaries reached per year, with an average of around 14,000 people per year reached through WFP-supported programmes between 2021 and 2023, dropping to 7,468 in 2024 with the closure of two out of three preschool feeding programmes (Table 10). This suggests that WFP China is likely not on track to achieve the overall beneficiary target of an estimated 49,700 Tier 2 beneficiaries reached by 2025. As the average WFP project has a three-year duration, and beneficiaries continue to receive support for several years, adding beneficiaries per year would result in double counting.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Stakeholder workshop with WFP China and Government of China staff, January 2025.

⁹² WFP China CSPE 2017-2021.

⁹³ WFP Country Capacity Strengthening policy update, June 2022. WFP China CSP 2022-2025. WFP China, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024. KIs with WFP staff, Government of China, UN and academic partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

⁹⁴ WFP China programmes are multi-year, usually three years. Summing beneficiaries across years would likely result in double counting. WFP China. CSP 2022-2025.

Table 10: Beneficiaries reached by the Government of China with WFP support by year and gender

CSP	Year	Gender	Smallholder farmers supported	Children (3 to 5 years) receiving preschool meals	Total
2017 to 2021	2021	Women	2,003	0	2,003
		Men	2,815	0	2,815
		Girls	0	4,437	4,437
		Boys	0	5,071	5,071
		Total	4,818	9,508	14,326
	Jan to June 2022	Women	3,550	0	3,550
		Men	4,780	0	4,780
		Girls	0	3,000	3,000
		Boys	0	4,000	4,000
		Total	8,330	7,000	15,330
2022 to 2025	Jul to Dec 2022	Women	4,500	0	4,500
		Men	3,000	0	3,000
		Girls	0	2,700	2,700
		Boys	0	2,900	2,900
		Total	7,500	5,600	13,100
	2023	Women	2,300	0	2,300
		Men	3,200	0	3,200
		Girls	0	3,700	3,700
		Boys	0	3,600	3,600
		Total	5,500	7,300	12,800
	2024	Women	missing	0	missing
		Men	missing	0	missing
		Girls	0	2,628	2,628
		Boys	0	2,859	2,859
		Total	1,981	5,487	7,468

Source: Annual country report (ACR) 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to June, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, ACR 2024, 2023 monitoring and evaluation (M&E) statistics table, data extracted on 20 June 2024 and 20 April 2025

Note: Gender data of 2023 smallholder farmers supported is extracted and estimated from 2023 M&E statistics table

Table 11: Output achievements (selected) by activity (2021 to June 2022)

Output indicator	2021				2022 Jan to June		
	Activity	Planned	Actual	% of plan achieved	Planned	Actual	% of plan achieved
C.4*: Number of people engaged in capacity strengthening initiatives facilitated by WFP to enhance national food security and nutrition stakeholder capacities (new)	Act 1: School-feeding	388	388	100.00%	194	416	214.43%
	Act 2: Value chains	32	32	100.00%	16	24	150.00%
	Act 3: Disaster prep	47	47	100.00%	50	51	102.00%
	Act 4: Sth-Sth	1,162	1,162	100.00%	350	132	37.71%
	Act 5: Knowledge sharing	1,066	1,066	100.00%	1,600	1,229	76.81%
	Act 6: Smallholder leadership	1,441	1,441	100.00%	316	360	113.92%
C.5*: Number of capacity strengthening initiatives facilitated by WFP to enhance national food security and nutrition stakeholder capacities (new)	Act 1: School-feeding	22	22	100.00%	10	5	50.00%
	Act 2: Value chains	7	7	100.00%	3	1	33.33%
	Act 3: Disaster prep	7	7	100.00%	3	5	166.67%
	Act 4: Sth-Sth	4	4	100.00%	2	1	50.00%
	Act 5: Knowledge sharing	11	11	100.00%	4	4	100.00%
	Act 6: Smallholder leadership	201	201	100.00%	9	9	100.00%
K.1: Number of partners supported (O.1: Number of partners supported)	Act 7: Partnerships				4	4	100.00%

Source: ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to June, data extracted on 20 June 2024. Sample of indicators selected by the evaluation team to match as closely as possible with the CSP 2022-2025 framework (Table 12). Green = 90% and above. Yellow = 75% to 89%. Orange = 51% to 74%. Red = 50% or below

Table 12: Output achievements by activity (July 2022 to 2024)

Output indicator	2022 Jul to Dec				2023			2024		
	Activity	Planned	Actual	% of plan achieved	Planned	Actual	% of plan achieved	Planned	Actual	% of plan achieved
C.4*: Number of people engaged in capacity strengthening initiatives facilitated by WFP to enhance national food security and nutrition stakeholder capacities (new)	Activity 1: Value chains	10	12	120.00%	151	151	100.00%	40	40	100.00%
	Activity 2: School-feeding	80	90	112.50%	68	68	100.00%	40	1,036	2590.00%
C.5*: Number of capacity strengthening initiatives facilitated by WFP to enhance national food security and nutrition stakeholder capacities (new)	Activity 1: Value chains	2	2	100.00%	14	14	100.00%	5	6	120.00%
	Activity 2: School-feeding	3	3	100.00%	5	5	100.00%	3	3	100.00%
C.6*: Number of tools or products developed or revised to enhance national food security and nutrition systems as a result of WFP capacity strengthening support (new)	Activity 1: Value chains	6	6	100.00%	8	8	100.00%	3	5	166.67%
	Activity 2: School-feeding	3	3	100.00%	6	6	100.00%	4	6	150.00%
K.1: Number of partners supported (O.1: Number of partners supported)	Activity 3: Partnership	7	7	100.00%	6	6	100.00%	6	7	116.67%

Source: ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to Jun, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, ACR 2024, data extracted on 20 June 2024 and 20 April 2025

Note: In ACR 2023, indicator 'Number of partners supported' is labelled as O.1. The wording of indicators changed ACR 2024. Green = 90% and above. Yellow = 75% to 89%. Orange = 51% to 74%. Red = 50% or below

76. **Capacity strengthening:** This is a central focus of the CSP 2022-2025. However, WFP China lacks a clear articulation of **how** it intends to build capacity and **whose** capacity will be built.⁹⁵ WFP China reports on standard WFP country capacity strengthening indicators, however these indicators show the number of projects and people supported by WFP China and do not provide a good basis to measure changes in capacity. However, assessing progress against the reconstructed capacity framework (Figure 10), the evaluation team found evidence of progress in supporting increased individual and organizational capacity at the provincial level. Partners increased their capacity in project design and monitoring, and inclusive approaches. However, in practice, project design has largely been driven by the analysis by WFP of remaining gaps (in the case of preschool feeding) or the priorities of private sector partners (for the Jilin risk management and Gansu zinc-enriched potato projects). The ability of WFP to forge closer engagement and coordination across different government departments, communities the private sector and academia was a driver of innovation (EQs 4.1 and 4.2). Echoing a widely reported view, one provincial project management office representative told the evaluation team: “WFP plays an important role in coordinating partners, providing technical and policy advice, and supporting project execution and sustainability strategies.”

77. Despite good progress at the provincial level, WFP is yet to see any evidence of uptake and expansion of WFP pilots at the national level. Neither the CSP, project designs nor implementation strategies at the provincial level include a clear strategy to deliver evidence to national decision makers to support project scale-up, based on an understanding of evidence needs and gaps at the national level. Therefore, despite increasing both its communications and project-level evidence generation, there is a strong perception by the Government, United Nations and academic partners that WFP needs to improve the quality of its evidence generation if it is to achieve uptake at the national level (EQ 2.3).⁹⁶

Activity 1: Value chains

78. Stakeholders credited WFP efforts in integrating smallholder farmers into nutrition-sensitive value chains by enhancing their capabilities, improving their nutritional status and livelihoods and increasing their income. However, issues, such as how to further enhance the brand value, strengthen farmers’ adaptability and resilience to extreme weather, and improve the sustainability of the project, deserve further attention. Additionally, from a technical perspective, the evaluation methods for relevant projects could be further refined to deepen the scientific understanding of the outcomes of these initiatives.

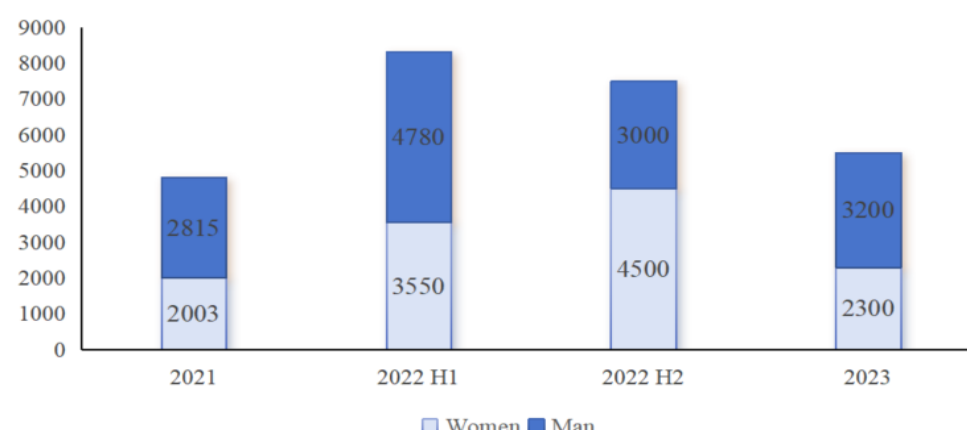
79. The ability of WFP to support smallholder farmers peaked in the first half (H1) of 2022 (3,550 women, 4,780 men), declining across 2022 and 2023, but remaining higher than 2021 (Figure 12).⁹⁷

⁹⁵ For example, WFP China does not have a framework to measure capacity strengthening, such as the pathways for capacity change set out in WFP’s Country Capacity Strengthening Policy Update (June 2022) or equivalent framework.

⁹⁶ KII with Government of China, UN, academic partners, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team review of WFP China communication outputs, Centre of Excellence publications, Partnership Action Plan and Annual Retreat reports for 2021 and 2024.

⁹⁷ Note that these numbers also include individuals who participated in the home-grown school feeding supply chain.

Figure 12: Number of value chains (Act 1) beneficiaries in government programmes supported by WFP



Source: ACR 2021, 2022 and 2023, data extracted on 20 June 2024

Output and outcome achievement

80. WFP-supported provincial-level value chain projects demonstrated positive results concerning most outcome indicators. Of the targeted smallholder farmers, 94 percent reported an increase in the production of nutritious crops, and both the value and volume of smallholder sales met the end-CSP target as well as the 2022 overall target. Under “number of national food security and nutrition policies, programmes and system components enhanced,” WFP reports on the number of programmes it supports. In 2023, the zinc-enriched potato project concluded, reducing the total number of value chain-related projects from two to one, though the start of the Yanqing disability project in 2024 increased the number to two again (Table 13).⁹⁸

Table 13: Outcome achievements (Act 1) (2022 to 2024)

Outcome indicator	Activity	Baseline 2022	2022 follow-up	2023 follow-up	2024 follow-up
Percentage of targeted smallholder farmers reporting increased production of nutritious crops, disaggregated by sex of smallholder farmer	Activity1	0	94	/	/
Number of national food security and nutrition policies, programmes and system components enhanced as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new)	Activity1	2	2	1	2
	Activity2	3	3	3	1
Value and volume of smallholder sales through WFP-supported aggregation systems: Value (USD)	Activity1	8,288.77	649,195.86	/	573.89
	Activity2	162,163.13	271,545.95	291,345.60	101,204.53
Value and volume of smallholder sales through WFP-supported aggregation systems: Volume (mt)	Activity1	4.05	2,803.00	/	0.74
	Activity2	169.37	279.86	196.10	51.45

Source: ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, ACR 2024, data extracted on 20 June 2024 and 20 April 2025.

Note: The wording of indicators changed in ACR 2023 and ACR 2024

⁹⁸ KII with WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024.

Zinc-enriched potato project in Gansu province

81. Launched in 2019, the zinc-enriched potato project integrates the development of local key industries with nutritional interventions, using zinc-enriched potatoes as a focal point to support smallholder farmers in cultivating nutrient-rich crops. It comprises five closely linked and mutually supportive subprojects and objectives: (i) establishing a cultivation technology system for zinc-enriched potatoes; (ii) supporting production of zinc-enriched potatoes for 3,150 smallholders; (iii) developing the value chain for zinc-enriched potatoes and improving smallholder potato storage technologies; (iv) disseminating nutritional knowledge; and (v) documenting, promoting and disseminating project outcomes.⁹⁹

82. According to the endline evaluation report, the project aims to develop sustainable solutions that enhance livelihoods for small farmers in remote regions of China and address issues of zinc deficiency, contributing to the elimination of “hidden hunger,” achieving food security, improving nutrition and promoting sustainable agricultural development.¹⁰⁰ **WFP support for zinc-enriched potato cultivation increased yields, strengthened climate resilience and improved farmers’ nutritional status.** Of the targeted smallholders, 94 percent reported increased productivity, with average yields 18 percent higher than comparison groups.¹⁰¹ The endline report noted even higher figures for zinc-enriched potato production. The comprehensive technical efficiency¹⁰² of farmers involved in the project was 17.8 percent higher than that of regular farmers, meaning that farmers were able to grow almost a fifth more produce with the same inputs compared to the project baseline.¹⁰³

83. Farmers maintained stable yields despite hot and dry conditions, indicating a degree of resilience and an ability to withstand shocks. In 2023, Gansu province faced unusually high temperatures and severe drought in some areas. While regular potato yields were significantly impacted, the average yield of zinc-enriched potatoes surpassed the provincial average by 150 to 250 kg per mu.¹⁰⁴ Participating farmers saw their incomes increase by USD 28 to USD 42 per mu, while also boosting their zinc intake through daily diets.¹⁰⁵ Incomes particularly increased for women, who also saw their social status rise due to enhanced agricultural income.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, the project promoted more efficient use of water resources in arid regions, enhancing farmers’ capacity to cope with droughts, pests, diseases and other natural disasters.¹⁰⁷

84. Despite the significant increase in potato production, evidence regarding changes in nutritional status is mixed, indicating a need for further improvement in the programme monitoring methodology. The zinc content in WFP-supported projects was 38.5 percent higher than that of ordinary potatoes. WFP also integrated SBCC into the project (see EQ 2.4). Project reporting indicated an improvement in nutrition knowledge among caregivers of the sampled children and a decrease in the rate of zinc deficiency,¹⁰⁸ although it persisted, particularly among children aged 11 to 16 years. Additionally, although the nutritional

⁹⁹ Endline Evaluation Report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Zinc-Enriched Potato Pilot Project for Smallholder Farmers in Gansu, 2023. KII with academic partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Endline Evaluation Report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Zinc-Enriched Potato Pilot Project for Smallholder Farmers in Gansu, 2023.

¹⁰¹ ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023.

¹⁰² Comprehensive technical efficiency is a comprehensive assessment and evaluation of the resource allocation capability, utilization efficiency, and other capabilities of the decision making unit. It is generally believed that: Comprehensive technical efficiency = Pure technical efficiency × Scale efficiency, where pure technical efficiency reflects the production efficiency of the input factors when the decision-making unit reaches the optimal scale, and scale efficiency reflects the gap between the actual input scale and the optimal input scale. Endline Evaluation Report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Zinc-Enriched Potato Pilot Project for Smallholder Farmers in Gansu, 2023.

¹⁰³ Endline Evaluation Report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Zinc-Enriched Potato Pilot Project for Smallholder Farmers in Gansu, 2023.

¹⁰⁴ One mu is approximately 0.0667 hectares.

¹⁰⁵ ACR 2023.

¹⁰⁶ KIIs with cooperative manager, September 2024; KIIs with farmers, September 2024.

¹⁰⁷ ACR 2023.

¹⁰⁸ According to the endline report, the overall serum zinc deficiency rate decreased by 34.04% in the endline assessment (from 52.13% to 18.09%). Specifically, the serum zinc deficiency rate among children in the intervention group decreased by 41.10% (from 64.38% to 23.28%); among female children, the rate dropped by 19.15% (from 25.53% to 6.38%); and among male children, it decreased by 14.9% (from 26.60% to 11.70%).

knowledge awareness rate among caregivers of sampled children improved compared to the baseline results,¹⁰⁹ the dietary diversity score did not show significant improvement post-intervention. This suggests that, while participants may consume zinc-enriched potatoes, there was no increase in dietary diversity. The primary reasons for this are related to local dietary cultural practices and the accessibility of foods like vegetables.¹¹⁰ There were methodological shortcomings in the project evaluation, such as sample loss, difficulties in blood sampling and issues matching baseline and mid-term data due to differing methodologies.¹¹¹ Thus, caution is needed when interpreting these results.

85. The cultivation technical system for zinc-enriched potatoes was submitted for provincial review, and a dedicated committee established that, if approved, these cultivation standards could become provincial standards. At a higher level, there were annual presentations and promotions at potato industry conferences, which could generate national policy influence.¹¹² Academic partners involved in the project reported strengthening their capacities in project management and increasing their understanding of gender, inclusion and environment. They intend to use these lessons to inform future research.¹¹³

86. The project saw mixed uptake across different areas of China. Challenges with marketing and branding, price fluctuations and unwillingness to expand production without ongoing support were key barriers to uptake, especially in Anding. Farmers in Dongxiang had expanded production well beyond the initial area supported by WFP, reporting that zinc-enriched potatoes were tastier, high-yielding and drought-resistant. The presence of a strong cooperative in Dongxiang was a key factor in its success. However, in Anding, farmers had not expanded beyond the subsidized land directly supported by the project and were reluctant to increase cultivation, citing concerns about the need for ongoing support, particularly for fertilizers and storage facilities, sharp market price fluctuations and an aging farming population.¹¹⁴

87. Progress was made in branding potatoes, including developing product quality standards. However, several challenges persisted in marketing.¹¹⁵ The brand value of zinc-enriched potatoes remained low, with over 70 percent of farmers unaware of its branding significance. Farmers and consumers did not distinguish between zinc-enriched and regular potatoes, selling both at an average price of 0.63 yuan (USD 0.097). A large proportion of farmers (83.8 percent) had not joined cooperatives. Nearly 50 percent of farmers sold freshly harvested, undried potatoes for convenience, primarily through intermediaries.¹¹⁶

Holistic agricultural risk management project in Jilin province

88. The holistic agricultural risk management project in Jilin province focused on developing an agricultural revenue protection insurance model and promoting fertigation technology for smallholder maize growers; supplying fertilizer to crops through irrigation systems. **The project significantly increased food production in arid areas, showing clear advantages in crop height and drought resistance.**¹¹⁷ According to WFP, it reduced water usage by 30 percent to 40 percent and increased average maize yields by 10.8 percent, supporting both sustainable agriculture, food security and rural development goals in Jilin.¹¹⁸ Focus group discussions with farmers indicated that the implementation of integrated water

¹⁰⁹ For instance, according to the endline report, awareness of the foods richest in zinc increased by 3.32%, and awareness of diseases caused by zinc deficiency in children rose by 5.76%.

¹¹⁰ Endline Evaluation Report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Zinc-Enriched Potato Pilot Project for Smallholder Farmers in Gansu, 2023. KII with academic partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹¹¹ FGD with the potato project evaluation team, August 2024. Endline Evaluation Report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Zinc-Enriched Potato Pilot Project for Smallholder Farmers in Gansu, 2023.

¹¹² KIIs with WFP staff, August 2024; FGD with PMO, August 2024; FGD with Ag Tech experts, September 2024.

¹¹³ KII with academic partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹¹⁴ KIIs with cooperative manager, September 2024. KIIs with farmers, September 2024.

¹¹⁵ KIIs with WFP staff (ACT1), August 2024; FGD with AAS, August 2024; FGD with PMO, August 2024; FGD with Ag Tech experts, September 2024, KIIs and FGDs with stakeholders, August and September 2024.

¹¹⁶ Endline Evaluation Report of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) Zinc-Enriched Potato Pilot Project for Smallholder Farmers in Gansu, 2023.

¹¹⁷ Progress Report of the Jilin Project, December 2023. FGD with PMO, September 2024. FGD with farmers, September 2024.

¹¹⁸ ACR 2023. FGD with PMO, September 2024.

and fertilizer management had a positive economic impact, and this boost in household income enabled them to invest further in their agricultural operations.¹¹⁹

89. The new revenue protection insurance introduced by the project surpassed that of traditional cost insurance, as it covered both yield and price risks. Smallholder farmer households received payouts of USD 50 per hectare (USD 3.30 per mu), totalling USD 32,000 from July to December 2022 and USD 42,060 in 2023 following flooding both years.¹²⁰ Focus group discussions with both the insurance company and farmers indicated that the project enhanced farmers' understanding of insurance and futures through training and direct participation.¹²¹

90. Farmers valued the training provided by the project, especially in managing new equipment and timing water and fertilizer applications. However, the effectiveness of training varied. The combination of futures and insurance presented technical challenges, such as managing basis risk between futures and spot prices and determining optimal premium rates. Training farmers on these complex financial concepts proved difficult, with adoption levels varying. Large-scale farmers showed more interest due to higher investments and expected returns, while smallholders struggled to understand and accept new insurance models, particularly when transitioning from cost insurance to income insurance.¹²² Farmers responded better to field demonstrations than classroom training.¹²³ The habitual use of traditional farming methods complicated efforts to reduce fertilizer use.¹²⁴ Farmers suggested follow-up training on advanced, innovative sustainable technologies.¹²⁵

91. Despite these achievements, farmers raised concerns about their ability to fund the ongoing cost of equipment and sustain income insurance beyond the end of WFP support. Farmers stressed that ongoing financial support, such as subsidies for equipment and inputs, was essential for the long-term sustainability of technology. Farmers discussed the potential of biodegradable pipes as a sustainable alternative, which could reduce labour costs linked to pipe recovery and maintenance, although the initial costs might be higher and require careful cost-benefit analysis.¹²⁶ Smallholder farmers were not expected to be able to pay the cost of income insurance without ongoing subsidies. WFP and the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs had funded 100 percent of the cost of premiums in year 1 of the project, requesting a 10 percent co-contribution in year 2. The project implementation team saw the potential for the Chinese Government to take on the programme; both national and provincial programmes were subsidizing insurance, but had not developed concrete plans to advocate at the national level to hand over the programme.¹²⁷

Beijing Yanqing project for empowering people with disabilities

92. The empowering people with disabilities project started in 2024, building on a previous phase supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project established a greenhouse for 48 people who have a person with disability in their family, with incomes increasing by about 3,000 yuan (USD 421) monthly. Produce was provided to the sister bakery project, which provided training and job opportunities for people with disability. Despite a strong focus on inclusion, especially the bakery component, there were difficulties related to limited output, funding for workers and sustaining growth without ongoing external support. The next phase intends to focus on improving planting techniques, strengthening market connections and sustainability.¹²⁸

¹¹⁹ FGD with farmers, September 2024.

¹²⁰ ACR 2022 and 2023. Biannual programme progress reports covering December 2021 to November 2023. FGD with insurance company and farmers, September 2024.

¹²¹ FGD with insurance company and farmers, September 2024. Biannual programme progress reports covering December 2021 to November 2023. FGD with insurance company and farmers, September 2024.

¹²² FGD with insurance company, September 2024. FGD with PMO, September 2024.

¹²³ FGD with PMO, September 2024.

¹²⁴ FGD with PMO, September 2024; FGD with Jilin PMO, September 2024.

¹²⁵ FGD with farmers, September 2024.

¹²⁶ FGD with farmers, September 2024.

¹²⁷ FGD with PMO, September 2024.

¹²⁸ KII with Yanqing PMO, September 2024; FGDs with greenhouse demonstration project and bakery operation project, September 2024.

Activity 2: Preschool feeding

93. WFP support for preschool feeding helped to improve the nutrition status and knowledge of preschool children aged 3 to 5 years in four provinces: Hunan, Guangxi, Gansu and Sichuan, filling a key gap in evidence generation for national policies. The intervention helped to reduce wasting and stunting but contributed to unintended increases in overweight and obese children and dental cavities among children in pilot areas, particularly in the first phase of programmes. Gaps in the design of project-level methodologies means that the data do not fully capture the scope of the project's results.

94. WFP beneficiary reach fell across the period under evaluation, from 9,508 children in 2021 to 5,487 in 2024, due to declining birth rates, preschool enrolment in project areas and the closure of two out of three preschool feeding programmes at the end of 2023. The drop in children reached in the second half of 2022 is due to COVID-19-related preschool closures. WFP and partners adapted by providing take-home rations (Table 14).¹²⁹

Table 14: Children (3 to 5 years) receiving preschool meals

	2021	2022 H1	2022 H2	2023	2024
Girl	4,437	3,000	2,700	3,700	2,628
Boy	5,071	4,000	2,900	3,600	2,859
Total	9,508	7,000	5,600	7,300	5,487

Source: ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to June, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, ACR 2024, 2023 M&E statistics table, data extracted on 20 June 2024 and 20 April 2025

Output and outcome achievement

95. The preschool feeding programme consistently achieved its output indicators, except for early 2022 when it fell slightly short of target due to the impact of COVID-19 (Table 11 and Table 12). WFP outcome indicators for preschool feeding do not really reflect the programme's achievements. WFP reports on increased value and volume of smallholder sales (both of which increased from the project baseline) (Table 15). However, integrating smallholder farmers is a small component of WFP support, with the main interventions focused on improving child nutrition through: 1) nutritional meal subsidies; 2) kitchen facility improvements; and 3) nutrition education.

Table 15: Outcome achievement (Act 2) (July 2022 to 2024)

Outcome indicator	Baseline 2022	2022 follow-up	2023 follow-up	2024 follow-up
Number of national food security and nutrition policies, programmes and system components enhanced as a result of WFP capacity strengthening (new)	3	3	3	1
Value and volume of smallholder sales through WFP-supported aggregation systems: Value (USD)	162,163.13	271,545.95	291,345.60	101,204.53
Value and volume of smallholder sales through WFP-supported aggregation systems: Volume (mt)	169.37	279.86	196.10	51.45

Source: ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, ACR 2024, data extracted on 20 June 2024 and 20 April 2025.

Note: The wording of indicators changed in ACR 2023 and ACR 2024

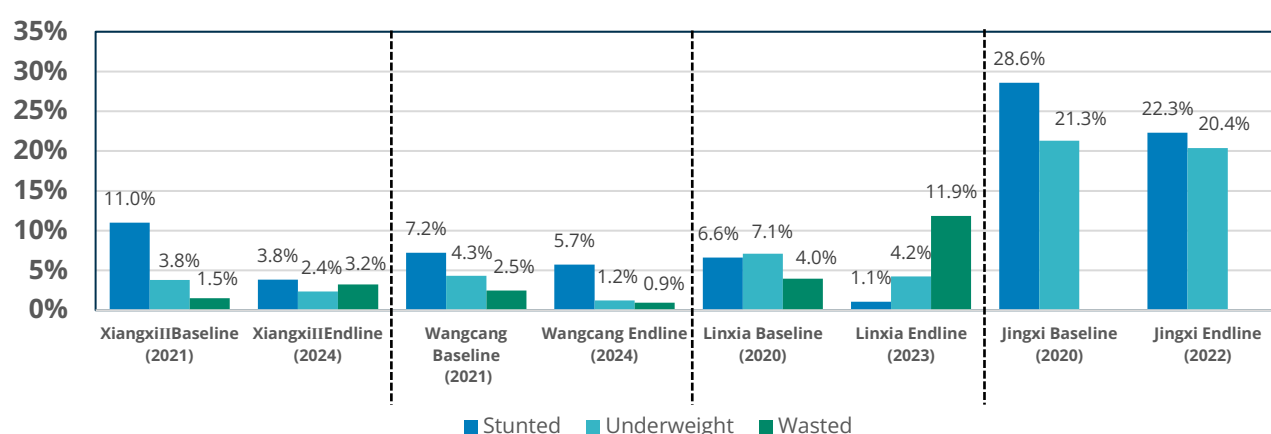
96. The intervention groups across all pilot areas showed varying levels of success in addressing nutritional indicators. While reductions in stunting and underweight children were generally observed, challenges remain, particularly in reducing wasting and anaemia in Linxia, indicating the need for continued focus and targeted interventions (Figure 13).

¹²⁹ KII with WFP China staff, PMO, FGD with selected kindergarten principals and teachers, Aug to Sept 2024.

97. **Most undernutrition indicators have significantly improved in all pilot areas after the implementation of the programme.**¹³⁰ Specifically, Xiangxi shows the most notable improvement in reducing stunting, with a decrease of 7.2 percent, followed by Jingxi at 6.3 percent and Linxia at 5.5 percent. Wangcang, on the other hand, has made more modest progress in stunting reduction, with a decrease of 1.5 percent. Slight reductions in underweight rates were noted across the regions, with decreases of 1.4 percent, 3.1 percent, 2.9 percent, and 0.9 percent in Xiangxi, Wangcang, Linxia, and Jingxi, respectively. However, the rise in wasting rates in areas like Xiangxi and Linxia still requires attention to enhance child nutrition outcomes (Table 16). Furthermore, while all pilot areas have achieved significant reductions in stunting and underweight children, these rates remain relatively high, particularly in Guangxi, compared to the average levels in rural China, which are 5.8 percent for stunting and 2.4 percent for underweight children.¹³¹

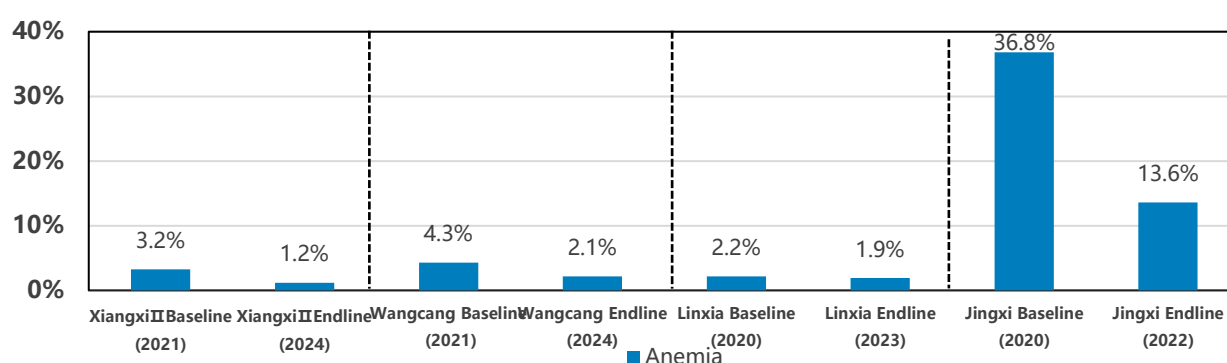
98. WFP-supported projects showed a **positive trend in decreasing anaemia across all the pilot areas.** Notably, Jingxi had a substantial decline in its anaemia rate among all the pilot areas, dropping from a high of 36.8 percent in 2020 to 13.6 percent by 2022. However, this rate remains higher than the average level of other pilot areas as well as the national average of 4.2 percent in 2021.¹³²

Figure 13: Child undernutrition status before and after the preschool feeding programme



Source: WFP baseline and endline reports for preschool feeding pilots

Figure 14: Child anaemia status (micronutrient deficiency) before and after the preschool feeding programme



Source: WFP baseline and endline reports for preschool feeding pilots

¹³⁰ WFP baseline & endline reports for preschool feeding pilots in Xiangxi, Wangcang, Linxia and Jingxi.

¹³¹ Report on the Nutrition and Chronic Disease Status of Chinese Residents (2020).

¹³² Statistical Monitoring Report of the "China Children's Development Outline (2021-2030).

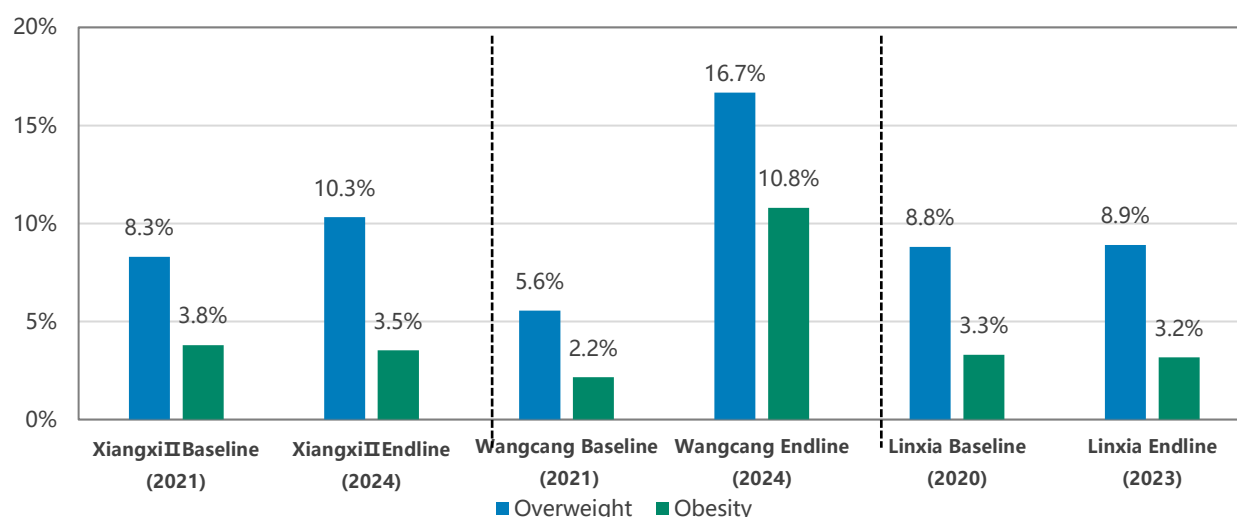
Table 16: Rate of change in nutritional indicators for children in the intervention group compared to the comparison group

	Xiangxi II		Wangcang		Linxia	
	Treatment	Comparison	Treatment	Comparison	Treatment	Comparison
Stunted	-5.70%	-2.42%	-9.32%	2.80%	-5.72%	-5.09%
Underweight	-1.72%	1.86%	-7.63%	-0.49%	-3.48%	-1.40%
Wasted	-0.58%	4.94%	-3.45%	-0.48%	7.63%	8.46%
Anaemia	-2.27%	-1.77%	-6.03%	0.00%	0.16%	-0.41%

Source: WFP baseline & endline reports for preschool feeding pilots. Note: The reports do not include the p-value for the differences in change rates between the comparison group and the intervention group and the evaluation team did not have the raw data to calculate this.

99. **The sharp increase of the prevalence of obesity and decayed teeth calls for targeted interventions.** In Wangcang, both overweight and obesity rates increased significantly following the project. Xiangxi shows a mixed picture with rising overweight children but stable obesity rates, while Linxia exhibits minimal changes (Figure 15).¹³³ These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to address childhood obesity and overweight issues across these areas. Three reasons likely explain the increased rates: 1) Eating too many snacks. Observations showed that the food portions provided in school cafeterias are strictly regulated, making it unlikely that children consume more than the standard amount of food. However, students enjoy eating snacks such as spicy strips and grilled skewers, while healthy snacks are relatively scarce. 2) Parents' lack of nutrition awareness. Parents' lack of nutrition awareness regarding balanced diets and snacks contributes to children consuming excessive amounts of unhealthy food. 3) Lack of physical activity. The level of physical activity among children has drastically decreased. In rural areas, smartphones have largely replaced active caregiving, with excessive phone use taking up time that would have previously been spent on physical activity.¹³⁴

Figure 15: Child overweight and obesity status before and after the preschool feeding programme.



Source: WFP baseline and endline reports for preschool feeding pilots

100. In Wangcang, the prevalence of decayed teeth dramatically rose from 10.27 percent at baseline in 2021 to 49.85 percent at the endline in 2024. Similarly, in the Linxia region, the rate of decayed teeth also saw a substantial rise, escalating from 54.20 percent in 2020 to 83.90 percent in 2023 (Figure 16).¹³⁵ The

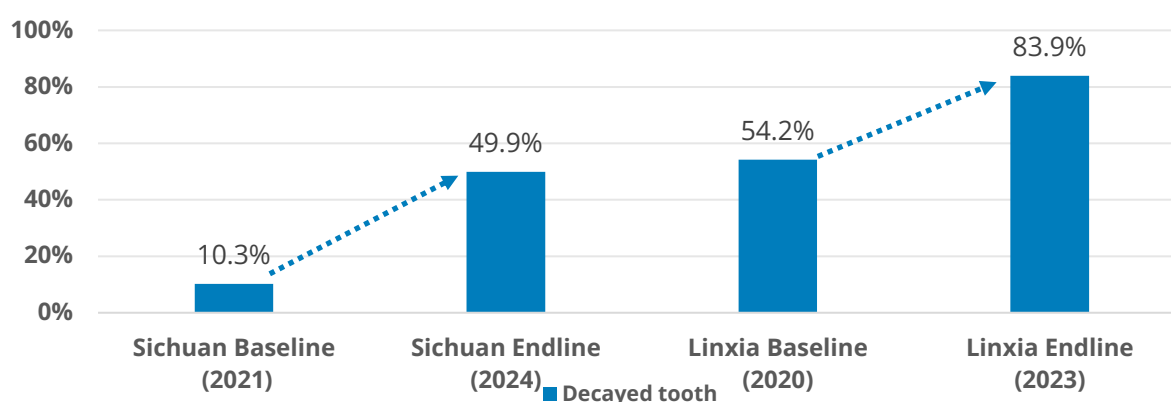
¹³³ WFP baseline & endline reports for preschool feeding pilots in Xiangxi, Wangcang and Linxia.

¹³⁴ KII with China Development Research Fund (CDRF), Aug 2024.

¹³⁵ WFP baseline & endline reports for preschool feeding pilots in Sichuan and Linxia.

issue was likely related to poor oral hygiene and lifestyle habits, which the nutritional intervention failed to effectively address. Stakeholders stressed the importance of addressing oral health in future interventions, particularly through supplementing trace elements and calcium intake.¹³⁶

Figure 16: Prevalence of decayed teeth before and after the preschool feeding programme



Source: WFP baseline & endline reports for preschool feeding pilots

101. Tailoring its package of support to local needs, cross-departmental collaboration and context-specific menus were key factors that contributed to the success of the school feeding programme. Building on lessons from previous nutrition projects, local governments were given more flexibility in determining the school meal modality.¹³⁷ For example, the Gansu project used the subsidies to provide free breakfast, the Sichuan project offered a combination of breakfast and snacks, while the Hunan project focused on ensuring the quality of breakfast, lunch and snacks. The project also focused on engaging local communities. For example, in Guangxi, local cooperatives, were engaged in developing nutritional food sources.

102. WFP and partners involved various departments such as agriculture, education, health and maternal and child health in project management at both the central and local levels.¹³⁸ County-level government teams led efforts to coordinate resources, breaking away from the traditional single-department management approach.¹³⁹

103. Seasonal menus were introduced in all project schools. Context-specific volume recipes in accordance with the national nutrition standards were developed. The selection of food materials for the recipes took into consideration localization, nutrition, ease of cooking and cost.¹⁴⁰ In the Hunan project, a recipe library was built, from which kindergartens could choose recipes without repetition and meet the minimum requirement of 25 kinds of food each week.¹⁴¹ Children's food diversity increased from 14 to 29. Digital technology was applied in Sichuan project, where a school meal monitoring system was developed to intelligently supervise the use of WFP funds and supply chains through five modules: food in and out of the warehouse; school attendance management; children's meal statistics; diet cost accounting; and project fund audit.¹⁴²

104. Current assessment methods underestimate the actual effectiveness at improving nutritional status of WFP-supported preschool feeding pilot projects. The evaluation team saw evidence of significant improvements in children's nutritional status. However, these change rates are not statistically significant in the inferential analysis in most project-level evaluations. The evaluation team believes this is due to

¹³⁶ KII with PMO, Evaluation team, Aug 2024.

¹³⁷ KII with PMO, Evaluation team, Aug 2024.

¹³⁸ KII with WFP China staff, MOE, NHC, PMO, evaluation team, Aug and Sep 2024. WFP. 2021. China Annual Country Report 2021 (Country Strategic Plan 2017-2022).

¹³⁹ KII with WFP China staff, Aug 2024.

¹⁴⁰ KII with WFP China staff, PMO, evaluation team, FGD with selected kindergarten principals and teachers, Aug and Sep 2024.

¹⁴¹ WFP. 2023. China Annual Country Report 2023 (Country Strategic Plan 2022-2025).

¹⁴² WFP. 2022. China Annual Country Report 2022 (Country Strategic Plan 2017-2022).

shortcomings in the design and process of the impact evaluation, which largely underestimated the actual effects of these projects. There are three points to pay attention to and improve: 1) Attrition and tracking: The project faces high attrition rates among children, making it challenging to track changes in health and nutrition.¹⁴³ This attrition could affect the long-term evaluation of project outcomes. As preschoolers from relatively better socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to move to other cities, the effects may be underestimated when their data are excluded. 2) Sampling power: The current evaluation sample sizes may not be sufficient to detect meaningful differences or changes in outcomes.¹⁴⁴ 3) Lack of heterogeneity analysis: The evaluation may not adequately account for the diversity across the population. Factors such as socioeconomic status and children's baseline nutritional status can influence the outcomes, so analysis is needed to explore how different subgroups respond to the interventions.¹⁴⁵

105. **Another critical factor for the underestimation of effectiveness is the selection and monitoring of the comparison preschools.** Since project coverage is one of the output indicators in the evaluation matrix, WFP tends to include all the preschools of worst situations in the projects. This results in a selection bias, where the comparison group consists of preschools that are inherently better off than their counterparts. Furthermore, the “John and Henry Effect”, which indicates that control groups may perform exceptionally well when they know they are being compared to the intervention group, lead them to mimic the activities of the intervention group. In the context of declining birth rates, the pressure of the enrolment competition may even compel the control group to place greater emphasis on students' nutritional status and education.¹⁴⁶ These factors will badly underestimate the project effects.

Activity 3: Partnerships

106. The WFP partnerships team has achieved results beyond what is reflected in CSP reporting, with the potential to grow partnerships further. Government partners value the global network of WFP in crisis areas and private sector partners value the convening power of WFP across the Government, academia and the private sector in China. Small funding allocations and long approval timelines are key challenges to growing public funding (see below).¹⁴⁷

Output and outcome achievement

107. Activity 3 involves facilitation for development and humanitarian cooperation with China. WFP pursues this through two dedicated teams: 1) government partnerships, which are largely focused on fundraising with MARA and CIDCA; and 2) private partnerships, which pursue fundraising and technical partnerships with companies, foundations and individual donors in China. As fundraising is not usually included as an activity in WFP CSPs, there are no indicators under the Corporate Results Framework that capture WFP activities in this area. WFP reports on one output indicator, “number of partners supported”, but does not report on outcomes. WFP China achieved its output results in 2022 and 2023, supporting seven partners in July to December 2022 (target = 7) and six in 2023 (target = 6).¹⁴⁸

WFP contributions and unintended outcomes

108. **The CSP reporting underrepresents WFP China's efforts in partnership and fundraising.** Overall, from 2021 to 26 September 2024, the Government and private fundraising teams secured over USD 51 million from partners in China or international companies for China-related projects (see EQ 4.3). Only 25 percent of this funding was recorded under the CSP, with the remainder funding WFP global

¹⁴³ KII with PMO, Evaluation team, Sep 2024.

¹⁴⁴ KII with PMO, Evaluation team, Sep 2024.

¹⁴⁵ WFP baseline & endline reports for preschool feeding pilots in Xiangxi, Wangcang and Linxia.

¹⁴⁶ KII with PMO, Evaluation team, FGD with selected kindergarten principals and teachers, Sep 2024.

¹⁴⁷ WFP China. ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. WFP China. Presentation on Government Partnerships. Sept 2024. KIIs. WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024. Note Verbale. Permanent Representation of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024.

¹⁴⁸ It is not possible to compare these results with the previous CSP reporting framework (2021 to June 2022) as partnership and facilitation outputs were spread across four activities, Act 5, 6, 7 and 8. KIIs with UN partner, WFP China staff, Aug and Sept 2024. WFP China programme data shared with the evaluation team on 26 September 2024 and MoUs between WFP China and MARA 2021 to 2024. WFP China ACRs 2021, 2022, 2023. WFP China Partnership Action Plan.

programmes to achieve zero hunger (SGD 2) (USD 29 million, or 57 percent of the total) or South-South cooperation (USD 9 million, 18 percent of the total) (Table 17).

Table 17: Funding (government and private) allocated to CSP, South-South cooperation and global programmes 2021-2024 (as of 26 September 2024) (USD)

Funding source	Allocated to	2021 (USD)	2022 (USD)	2023 (USD)	2024 (to 26 Sept) (USD)	Total (USD)	% of Total
Government funding	CSP (MARA)	2,300,000	2,350,000	2,350,000	2,350,000	9,350,000	18%
	South-South (MARA)	1,700,000	2,100,000	2,950,000	1,500,000	8,250,000	16%
	Global programmes (MARA)	4,000,000	250,000			4,250,000	8%
	Global programmes (CIDCA)	1,200,000	9,000,000	6,500,000	2,000,000	18,700,000	37%
	Total Government	9,200,000	13,700,000	11,800,000	5,850,000	40,550,000	79%
Private funding	CSP (Private)	2,393,062	679,109	475,319	20,132	3,567,622	7%
	South-South (Private)		620,000	210,000		830,000	2%
	Global programmes (Private)	594,706	704,230	4,150,230	612,940	6,062,106	12%
	Total private	2,987,768	2,003,339	4,835,549	633,072	10,459,728	21%
Total all sources		12,187,768	15,703,339	16,635,549	6,483,072	51,009,728	100%

MARA = Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. CIDCA = China International Development Cooperation Agency

Source: WFP China programme data shared with the evaluation team on 26 September 2024 and MoUs between WFP China and MARA 2021 to 2024

109. **There is significant scope to grow the fundraising partnership with China (see EQ 4.3).** WFP investment in Chinese speaking staff who can broker partnerships between China and the WFP global response is a key enabling factor. However, WFP needs to address key barriers including a heavy focus on “saving lives” rather than “changing lives” approaches, a USD 2 million limit on CIDCA grants and volatility and tight earmarking in private funding (see EQs 4.1 and 4.2).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ WFP China. ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. WFP China. Presentation on Government Partnerships. Sept 2024. KIIs. WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024. Note Verbale. Permanent Representation of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024.

EQ 2.2 To what extent and how are achievements under the CSP likely to be sustainable beyond WFP support or facilitation, in particular from a financial, social, institutional and environmental perspective?

Key finding 5: WFP-supported value chain projects demonstrate mixed sustainability. Provincial authorities have maintained projects beyond the end of WFP support, but there is no evidence of national scale-up. Short project cycles, gaps in branding and marketing, market volatility and climate change are key barriers to broader adoption. Nutrition projects showed stronger sustainability due to effective SBCC and localized capacity building efforts, but face challenges due to rising costs. Gaps in planning and evidence have hindered the ability of WFP to influence national-level planning to secure sustainable funding and take projects to scale. Many project management offices were only thinking about options to expand pilots in the final year of implementation. By then, WFP had missed opportunities to collect key data, such as cost benefit analyses, that national-level decision makers would need to assess feasibility for scale-up.

Activity 1: Value chain projects

110. **WFP-supported value chain projects exhibit mixed sustainability.** Provincial authorities and cooperatives expanded the Gansu potato project significantly, growing from 6,000 acres to tens of thousands, alongside notable brand development. However, challenges related to market volatility and infrastructure gaps hindered broader adoption.¹⁵⁰ Farmers in areas like Dongxiang benefited from strong cooperative support, which enabled the expansion of planting and the introduction of new varieties. In contrast, Anding saw limited progress due to dependence on subsidies.¹⁵¹ Similarly, the Jilin fertigation and risk insurance project faced challenges with low farmer engagement, with farmers overly reliant on government support.¹⁵² Integrated water and fertilizer management practices introduced by WFP were sustainable and scalable, but traditional farming habits slowed the adoption of new methods.¹⁵³ Complex insurance models also proved difficult for smallholder farmers to grasp, requiring more targeted financial training.¹⁵⁴ Provincial authorities in Anhui continued the Kiwi value chain project beyond the end of WFP support, but climate vulnerability and market access issues remain major obstacles to its long-term sustainability.¹⁵⁵

111. **Short project cycles are major threats to sustainability.** Partners reported challenges in maintaining collaboration with e-commerce platforms after the end of WFP support, citing the international reputation of WFP and its convening power as key factors in maintaining funding sustainability, enhancing brand value, and connecting with larger private sector sales platforms. New innovations such as the Jilin risk insurance project is complex to communicate and implement.¹⁵⁶ The majority of value chain projects supported by WFP will require extended support to test and improve approaches that are suitable for scale-up into national programmes.

Activity 2: Preschool feeding projects

112. The nutrition projects under Activity 2 have demonstrated potential for sustainability but are yet to see evidence of national scale-up. The focus on SBCC has played a key role in ensuring long-term success. Continuous health and nutrition education activities, involving both parents and children, have raised awareness of healthy dietary habits and encouraged behavioural change. These healthy behaviours, such as eating breakfast, were retained after the programme ended.¹⁵⁷ Localization of knowledge and capacity building is also a key factor contributing to sustainability. Partnerships with local universities have trained preschool educators in nutrition, creating a localized ecosystem for nutrition promotion and embedding the programme into regional structures.¹⁵⁸ In Linxia and Xiangxi, kindergartens continued to use the nutrition

¹⁵⁰ KII. UN partner. Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁵¹ KII with Government of China officials, academic partners and private sector partners. FGDs with farmers. Sep and Oct 2024.

¹⁵² KII with PMO and FGDs with farmers, September 2024. Mission report Jilin, 2021.

¹⁵³ KII with PMO and FGDs with farmers, September 2024.

¹⁵⁴ KII with insurance company, September 2024. Mission report Jilin, 2021.

¹⁵⁵ KII with PMO at county, town and village level, and kiwi cooperative manager, September 2024.

¹⁵⁶ KII with cooperative manager, PMO, county and village level, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁵⁷ KII with WFP China staff, PMO, FGD with selected kindergarten principals and teachers, Aug and Sep 2024.

¹⁵⁸ KII with WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024.

plans and recipes introduced by WFP even after the end of support, with teachers actively disseminating these practices. In some areas, projects have transitioned to parent-paid models, demonstrating adaptability in sustaining nutritious meal programmes despite funding constraints.¹⁵⁹ Additionally, the project's spillover effects, such as the learning exchanges between regions like Xiangxi and Sichuan, highlight the broader impact on policy support and local government attention to preschool populations.¹⁶⁰

113. Despite these successes, the nutrition projects face challenges in sustainability, particularly concerning the absence of a well-defined sustainability strategy and knowledge products to influence national policy. This is evident in Yongshun, where public and inclusive kindergartens, reliant on government subsidies, struggle to maintain meal quality in the face of rising costs. Unlike private kindergartens, which can adjust fees, public institutions face resistance from parents to increasing prices, making it crucial to design sustainability strategies that accommodate financial pressures without compromising meal quality.¹⁶¹

Sustainability of pilots

114. **Gaps in planning and evidence generation are key barriers to achieving scale.** The overall aim of the WFP strategic approach is to support innovative piloting programmes that can be adopted into national policies. China has a long tradition of piloting food security and rural development approaches at the provincial level before rolling them out as national programmes. However, WFP does not support planning for scale-up from the beginning of programmes. Most project management office staff interviewed by the evaluation team were only beginning to think about securing funding to extend or expand pilots in the final year of the programme.¹⁶² This contributed to missed opportunities to develop targeted knowledge products to influence national policy. While nutrition pilot programmes in regions like Gansu, Hunan, and Sichuan have yielded valuable insights, these have not been effectively transformed into policy recommendations.¹⁶³ The WFP-supported pilots also missed the opportunity to collect key data that would be particularly relevant to decision makers at the national level, such as cost benefit analysis.¹⁶⁴

EQ 2.3 To what extent and how did the WFP concept-testing (resilience, productivity) and rural resilience approaches enhance access to markets for smallholder farmers and strengthen the link between poverty alleviation and rural revitalization?

Key finding 6: In 2020, China transitioned from poverty alleviation to rural revitalization, aiming for agricultural modernization. However, some regions still risk falling back into poverty due to weak long-term development strategies, especially for smallholder farmers. WFP has offered a potential pathway to bridge this gap by enhancing market access for smallholder farmers and supporting an increased supply of nutritious locally produced food.

115. WFP capacity strengthening support to provincial governments helped to pilot potential pathways to bridge the gap between poverty alleviation and rural revitalization by improving smallholder farmers' production technology and integrating them into value chains. The comparative advantage of WFP lies in its logistics capacity, emergency food assistance and financing expertise.¹⁶⁵ As a trusted partner of the Chinese Government, WFP has effectively connected local and international resources, helping to increase the provincial governments' focus on the risk of smallholder farmers being marginalized in the process of agricultural modernization.¹⁶⁶ The focus by WFP on vulnerable groups, especially smallholder farmers, under the United Nations' "leave no one behind" agenda, has supported an increased focus at the provincial level on addressing the gaps often left by large-scale agricultural modernization. Through value

¹⁵⁹ KII with WFP China staff, PMO, Aug and Sep 2024.

¹⁶⁰ KII with WFP China staff, FGD with selected kindergarten principals and teachers, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁶¹ KII with PMO, FGD with selected kindergarten principals and teachers, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁶² WFP, the Evolution and Practice of China's Food Security Policies (1978-2018), 2021. KII with Government of China, PMO, academic, private sector partners, WFP China staff and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. WFP China. South-South Cooperation Knowledge Sharing, <http://www.wfpchinacoe.net/>, accessed 18 October 2024.

¹⁶³ KII with WFP China staff, Evaluation team, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁶⁴ KII with WFP China staff, PMO, Aug and Sep 2024.

¹⁶⁵ KII. UN partner. Sept and Oct 2024.

¹⁶⁶ KII. Government of China (national level). Sept and Oct 2024.

chain projects and preschool feeding projects, WFP has helped provincial governments to pilot new approaches to production and planting technology for smallholder farmer and supported approaches to integrate smallholder famers into value chains.¹⁶⁷ Provincial government, private sector and academic partners value the practical and execution-focused approach by WFP and its ability to foster communication with the local project management office during project design and implementation so that interventions are not only theoretically sound but also operationally effective.¹⁶⁸

The WFP school meal project provides a concrete example of WFP success in supporting small farmers while contributing to rural revitalization. This initiative connects small farmers to the supply chain for school meals, addressing preschool children's nutritional needs while creating a stable market for low-income farmers. The project established a localized, low-cost supply chain that integrated small farmers into the school meal programme, giving them a stable market to sell their products.¹⁶⁹ This model not only improved the nutritional status of preschool children but also created a sustainable income source for small farmers (Table 18).¹⁷⁰ However, the pilot project inadvertently caused an increase in obesity rates and overweight children, especially during the first phase of implementation. Phase II projects increased the focus on community engagement and locally led design of school menus, which improved outcomes (see EQ 2.1, Preschool feeding).

Table 18: Smallholder farmer participation in the preschool feeding programme

Year/period	Number of smallholders	Total food supplied (kg)	Value of food supplied (USD)
2021	119	37,440	60,275.25
2022 H1	350	170,000	160,000
2022 H2	300	110,000	110,000
2023	340	200,000	294,000
2024	222	51,445	101,205

Source: ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to June, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023

EQ 2.4 Achievement of cross-cutting aims

Key finding 7: WFP achieved gender inclusion in its capacity strengthening programmes, but failed to systematically embed the increased gender-transformative ambitions of the CSP 2022-2025 into activities on the ground, despite some individual successes. WFP achieved mixed results in disability. People with disability were included in WFP-supported projects as beneficiaries but were not consistently given a role in design and monitoring and many project sites were not accessible to people with disability. Nutrition integration and environmental sustainability emerged as key pillars of WFP capacity strengthening, helping to localize nutrition goals and support measures to reduce the use of water, fertilizer and chemicals and build climate resilience across supply chains. WFP missed the opportunity to work consistently with provincial governments to advocate for strong feedback mechanisms, building on the successful engagement of WFP around vulnerability targeting

116. **Accountability to affected populations:** WFP could have done more to work with local partners to advocate for stronger community and feedback mechanisms, drawing on the approach it took to influencing targeting and beneficiary selection (EQ 3.2). WFP China chose to report on the corporate indicator CC.2.2: "Country office meets or exceeds the UNDIS standards on consulting organizations of persons with disabilities (QCPR)" (see disability inclusion below for a discussion of results).

¹⁶⁷ KII. WFP China staff. Sept and Oct 2024.

¹⁶⁸ KII. WFP China staff, PMO. Sept and Oct 2024.

¹⁶⁹ FGD with smallholder famers, Aug to Sept 2024.

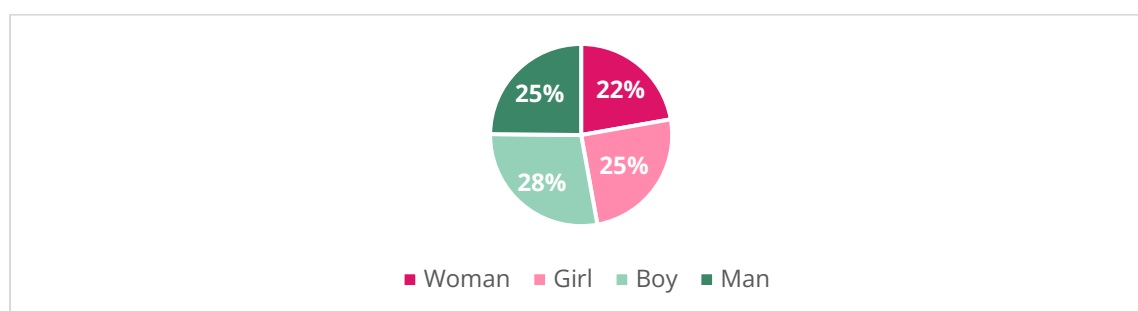
¹⁷⁰ WFP. 2021. China Annual Country Report 2021 (Country Strategic Plan 2017-2022). KII PMO, Aug and Sep 2024. KII with PMO, Aug to Sept 2024.

117. WFP China prominently displayed posters on prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse and confidential complaints mechanisms in its own office and was engaging with United Nations partners to develop standard operating procedures for inter-agency referral.¹⁷¹

118. WFP maintained strong collaboration with government entities, particularly at the provincial level, including through annual field missions and joint programme reviews (see EQ 4.1).¹⁷² However, it could have done more to ensure that people benefiting from activities supported through WFP capacity strengthening had access to complaints mechanisms, including for protection issues. Farmers and preschool participants told the evaluation team they raised project-related issues with village or school leaders. While the capacity strengthening role of WFP means it cannot directly implement community feedback mechanisms, it can engage with local partners to encourage formal feedback mechanisms and advocate for the systematic use of community feedback in project design and monitoring.¹⁷³

119. **Gender:** WFP achieved strong results in gender inclusion but failed to embed the CSP's more ambitious gender-transformative approach in the design and implementation of its capacity strengthening programmes. WFP engaged closely with provincial government partners during design and beneficiary selection, achieving close to gender parity in projects supported by WFP capacity strengthening, with women and girls accounting for 22 percent and 25 percent of beneficiaries (see Figure 17).

Figure 17: Share of beneficiaries reached by the Government of China with WFP support by gender (2021 to 2024)



Source: ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to June, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, 2023 M&E statistics table, data extracted on 20 June 2024

Note: Gender data of 2023 smallholder farmers supported is extracted and estimated from 2023 M&E statistics table

120. WFP China did not undertake a gender analysis during the period under review, but conducted a decentralized evaluation of its preschool pilot approach in 2022.¹⁷⁴ WFP also commissioned a large number of project-level evaluations, in line with recommendations from the previous CSPE.¹⁷⁵ WFP China's Centre of Excellence for South-South and Triangular Cooperation¹⁷⁶ also published a large number of knowledge products, including case studies of the zinc-enriched potato and Kiwi value chain projects delivered under the CSP (Figure 7).¹⁷⁷

121. WFP China also fully integrated gender (Gender and Age Marker (GAM) 3) in the design of all its activities from 2021 to 2024, but only fully integrated gender and age (GAM 4) for nutrition programming in

¹⁷¹ KII with UN partners and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team site visit to WFP China country office, Aug 2024.

¹⁷² KII with PMOs, private sector partners, WFP staff, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team analysis of 26 field mission reports from April 2021 to Sept 2023.

¹⁷³ FGDs with farmers, parents, teachers and principals, Sept to Oct 2024. Evaluation team review of project design documents, project evaluation reports and field mission reports from April 2021 to Sept 2023 provided by WFP China. WFP, Protection and Accountability Handbook, October 2021.

¹⁷⁴ Decentralized Evaluation Report for the Impact Evaluation of the Preschool Nutrition Pilot in Selected Counties of Xiangxi Prefecture, Hunan, PR China. Available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/china-preschool-nutrition-pilot-selected-countries-china-feb-2018-jan-2021-evaluation-basel>.

¹⁷⁵ WFP China CSPE 2017-2021.

¹⁷⁶ South-South cooperation sits outside the WFP China CSP 2022-2025. See Annex 3.

¹⁷⁷ WFP China. South-South Cooperation Knowledge Sharing, <http://www.wfpchinacoe.net/>, accessed 18 October 2024

2021 and 2022 and for facilitation for development in the second half of 2022 (see Table 19). **The lack of age-disaggregated data for value chains capacity strengthening is concerning, as elderly people made up an increasing proportion of the rural workforce, with many needing tailored support to maintain their livelihoods.**¹⁷⁸

Table 19: Gender and Age Marker Score: WFP China CSP 2017-2021 and 2022-2025

CSP ACTIVITY	CSP 2017-2021		CSP 2022-2025		
	2021	2022 Jan to June	2022 Jul to Dec	2023	2024
Provide advice and technical assistance for extending nutrition programmes to hard-to-reach areas	4	4			
Provide advice and assistance on integrating smallholder farmers into nutrition-sensitive value chains to national stakeholders.			3	3	3
Provide advice and assistance on extending nutrition-sensitive school feeding programmes to national stakeholders.			4	3	3
Provide facilitation for development and humanitarian cooperation with China			4		

Source: ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to Jun, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, data extracted on 19 June 2024

122. The CSP 2022-2025 increased the WFP level of ambition for gender in China, committing to a gender-transformative approach, including allocating 15 percent of its budget to projects with gender equality and women's empowerment considerations by 2025.¹⁷⁹ However, **progress in implementing this more ambitious agenda was mixed.** The country office has not completed a standalone gender analysis, a key step in moving to a transformative approach. WFP staff reported using the WFP Gender Policy 2022 to inform CSP and project design, but did not include gender indicators in the CSP logical framework. Staff admitted that they did not have systems in place to track gender budget allocations.¹⁸⁰

123. The evaluation saw some evidence of some progress towards actions for women's empowerment at the provincial level, but most partners were still focused on inclusion. Some women involved in the value chains project told the evaluation team they had experienced an increase in their household status due to their earnings from farming.¹⁸¹ One woman involved in supplying vegetables to the WFP supported school feeding programme told the evaluation team: "I really benefited from the training and support provided to smallholder farmers under the preschool feeding programme. With the support of the programme, I expanded from two vegetable greenhouses to six. My produce now provides 70 percent of my family's income."

124. Several young academics told the evaluation team they had been promoted due to work on WFP projects, the majority were young women. WFP also engaged with local women's federations to support the design of several capacity strengthening projects.¹⁸²

125. However, most project participants, when asked about measures to promote women's leadership, control over land or resources or access to finance, responded that, "most of the project management office are women," or "we organized a cooking competition to engage women in the project." This suggests

¹⁷⁸ KII with Government of China, PMOs, cooperatives and private sector partners, Aug to Sept 2024. FGDs with farmer, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁷⁹ WFP China CSP 2022-2025. WFP Gender Policy 2022. KII with WFP staff, Aug to Sept 2022. WFP China ACR Jan to June 2022, July to Dec 2022, 2023.

¹⁸⁰ WFP China CSP 2022-2025. WFP Gender Policy 2022. KII with WFP staff, Aug to Sept 2022. WFP China ACR Jan to June 2022, July to Dec 2022, 2023. WFP. China Evaluation Actions, 19 June 2024.

¹⁸¹ FGD with women farmers, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁸² KII with PMOs, academic and private sector partners, Aug to Sept 2024. FGD with women farmers, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP. China Evaluation Actions, 19 June 2024.

that progress towards women's empowerment are not well understood at the project level.¹⁸³ Project evaluations also highlighted gender disparities in training engagement and effectiveness, with women participating less frequently in training sessions and showing lower gains in knowledge and practice adoption.¹⁸⁴

126. UN stakeholders valued the contribution by WFP to inter-agency planning around gender, including the UN Gender Theme Group, the annual United Nations Country Team System-Wide Action Plan (UNCT-SWAP) Gender Equality Scorecard Assessment, providing recommendations on the amendment to the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests in 2022 and delivering United Nations gender system training to UNCT members. United Nations partners reported that WFP had a strong understanding of rural women's development, suggesting there is potential for WFP to play a greater role.¹⁸⁵

127. **Disability inclusion:** Overall, WFP achieved mixed results in terms of disability inclusion. In 2023, WFP added an indicator to its monitoring framework on whether the country office meets or exceeds UNDIS entity accountability framework standards concerning accessibility (QCPR). WFP China reported that it had conducted preliminary work with the UNCT on consulting with organizations of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and accessibility for persons with disabilities, so was "approaching" compliance."¹⁸⁶

128. The evaluation team saw some inclusion of persons with disabilities in project implementation, including offering mechanized farming services to reduce the labour burden of elderly farmers and farmers with disability and developing specialized training and guidance for persons with disabilities to join cooperatives. WFP supported a disability-focused project in Yanqing. The bakery component was highly inclusive, providing jobs for people with intellectual disability and the greenhouse component was specifically for families of persons with disabilities. However, the greenhouse was not wheelchair accessible. While there are other forms of disability beyond physical disability, ensuring wheelchair access does appear to be a missed opportunity for a programme with such a strongly reported disability focus. Overall, the evaluation team did not see strong evidence that disability was consistently integrated into programme design and monitoring.¹⁸⁷

129. **Nutrition integration:** Nutrition integration is a core concept of the CSP. WFP integrates nutrition across both its value chains (Act 1) and preschool feeding (Activity 2) capacity strengthening through SBCC programmes reaching 18,581 people (10,181 females, 8,400 males) in 2021 and 11,000 people (6,000 females, 5,000 males) in 2023 (Table 20).¹⁸⁸ By using SBCC, nutrition projects help enhance teachers', caregivers' and children's nutrition knowledge and skills.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸³ KII with PMOs, academic and private sector partners, Aug to Sept 2024. FGD with women farmers, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China Evaluation Actions, 19 June 2024. FGDs with farmers, schoolteachers and parents, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP Gender Policy 2022. WFP. China Evaluation Actions, 19 June 2024.

¹⁸⁴ KII with Academic partners, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team analysis of project evaluations, baseline, midline and endline data provided by WFP China.

¹⁸⁵ WFP China, ACR Jan to June 2022, July to Dec 2022, 2023. KII with UN partners and WFP staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China Evaluation Actions, 19 June 2024. WFP China Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024

¹⁸⁶ Email. Evaluation Team to WFP China Reporting Unit. Sept 2024. WFP China ACR 2023.

¹⁸⁷ KII with cooperatives, PMOs, Government of China and school principals, Aug to Sept 2024. FGDs with Yanqing bakery and greenhouse project beneficiaries, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁸⁸ ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to June, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, 2023 M&E statistics table, data extracted on 20 June, 2024.

¹⁸⁹ KII. Government of China (national). Aug to Sept 2024. FGD with selected kindergarten principals and teachers, Aug to Sept 2024.

Table 20: People benefiting from social and behaviour change communication by year and gender

Year	Gender	People benefiting from SBCC
2021	Female	10,181
	Male	8,400
	Total	18,581
2022 Jan to June	Female	7,350
	Male	5,650
	Total	13,000
2022 Jul to Dec	Female	5,000
	Male	3,000
	Total	8,000
2023	Female	6,000
	Male	5,000
	Total	11,000
2024	Female	4,328
	Male	1,681
	Total	6,009

Source: ACR 2021, ACR 2022 Jan to June, ACR 2022 Jul to Dec, ACR 2023, ACR 2024 2023 M&E statistics table, data extracted on 20 June 2024 and 20 April 2025

Note: Gender data of 2023 smallholder farmers supported is extracted and estimated from 2023 M&E statistics table. The data for girls and boys are not available

130. The effectiveness of nutrition education in Xiangxi Phase I (Activity 2) was limited, with Phase II showing progress through improved SBCC and increased parental involvement using social media platforms. Social media tools like the WeChat group were established for the expert and parents in the Phase II of Xiangxi nutrition project to address caregivers' questions and issues on children's nutrition and health development.¹⁹⁰ During the pandemic, when school meals provision was temporarily closed, a take-home ration approach was applied in Gansu nutrition project (Act 2). Parents used the WeChat social media platform to upload the pictures of children eating at home.¹⁹¹ Gansu Linxia project also conducted nutrition education and activities like the "520 Nutrition Week"¹⁹² to raise public awareness about healthy eating and behaviour change.¹⁹³ After three years of intervention, the local population began to emphasize the importance of breakfast.¹⁹⁴ Even after the project concluded, the habit of having breakfast remained. In Sichuan, since rural people generally trust doctors more, doctors were involved in nutrition education, which achieved good results. Guangxi Nutrition Society (GNS) launched an "I am a little nutritionist" thematic activity, where children were guided to design and choose balanced meals.¹⁹⁵ Now, WFP is

¹⁹⁰ China Evaluation Actions, extracted June 2024.

¹⁹¹ KII with WFP China staff, PMO, Aug and Sep 2024.

¹⁹² 520 Nutrition Week: For national nutrition week and the 520 China Student Nutrition Day, all WFP projects organized various thematic activities to raise public awareness on children's nutrition. University students majoring in food and nutrition education walked into the rural kindergartens to teach nutrition and health. Children were guided to observe how vegetables transform from seed to food table and were encouraged to participate in vegetable planting activities in the school gardens. Other edutainment activities focusing on nutrition themes include food making, scene play, dance, fashion show, painting, clay production, etc.

¹⁹³ ACR 2023.

¹⁹⁴ KII with WFP China staff, PMO, Aug and Sep 2024. FGD with selected kindergarten principals and teachers, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁹⁵ ACR 2021.

supporting local authorities in Lixian, Gansu, to apply a similar model.¹⁹⁶ In Gansu, WFP supported local government by brokering a partnership with media channels to deliver six nutrition education sessions, which used animated videos and community cooking activities to spread knowledge about the importance of zinc consumption. The livestream cooking event received 649,000 views.¹⁹⁷

131. **Environmental sustainability and climate change:** Environmental sustainability and climate change have become increasingly important considerations in WFP projects. The environmental sustainability indicator, "CC.4.1 Proportion of FLAS/MoUs/CCS for CSP activities screened for environmental and social risks," was introduced in 2023, focusing on the number of projects that apply the environmental and social protection screening tool. Since the indicator was only adopted in 2023, ongoing projects at that time did not undergo this screening, resulting in zero numbers reported. However, progress is expected in 2024, as new projects like the Yanqing project and the Gansu Lixian nutrition project have been screened.¹⁹⁸

132. WFP integrated environmental sustainability into its value chain capacity building (Act 1), especially the Gansu potato project. Measures like soil monitoring and recycling agricultural plastic film were introduced to minimize environmental impacts.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, drought-resistant zinc-enriched potato varieties were introduced to help farmers adapt to increasing droughts.²⁰⁰ However, broader initiatives aimed at addressing climate change and enhancing resilience are limited, which highlights potential areas for future development.²⁰¹ In Jilin, fertigation techniques have significantly improved crop yields and resource efficiency, reducing water usage by 30-40 percent in demonstration areas. These advances contribute to sustainable agriculture and support broader food security and rural development goals in the region. Additionally, the project emphasizes recycling plastic pipes, further reducing environmental pollution.²⁰² Moreover, income insurance in these projects provides comprehensive coverage for both yield and price risks, enhancing farmers' climate risk management abilities through training and direct involvement.²⁰³

133. Initial environmental considerations in WFP-supported nutrition capacity strengthening (Act 2) was relatively limited due to the primary focus on meal provision. However, as the project progressed, provincial partners began to expand environmental requirements such as limits on pesticide and antibiotic residues, reducing fertilizer use and improving livestock standards for preschool meal supply chains. These changes were often driven by food safety standards concerns but had flow-on environmental benefits.²⁰⁴

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 and how were the CSP outputs and related budget delivered within the intended timeframe?

Key finding 8: The implementation of the CSP yielded outputs efficiently within the designated timeframe, with very few delays. However, several challenges emerged in specific projects, including delays in the timeliness of supplies and disruptions caused by COVID-19. WFP China's ability to disperse timely funding was in line with global trends. Slow approval of contracts is a perceived barrier to building engagement with the private sector.

¹⁹⁶ KII with WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024.

¹⁹⁷ KII with PMO and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China communications and advocacy support database, shared 4 September 2024.

¹⁹⁸ KII. WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024. email evaluation team to WFP China reporting team. Sept 2024.

¹⁹⁹ KII. WFP China staff, PMO. Aug to Sept 2024. ACR 2022.

²⁰⁰ KII with PMO. Sep 2024.

²⁰¹ KII. Cooperative manager. Aug to Sept 2024.

²⁰² FGD with PMO, Sep 2024.

²⁰³ KII with insurance company, September 2024.

²⁰⁴ FGD with smallholder farmers, Aug to Sept 2024.

134. Project implementation has been timely since 2022, with no significant delays in capacity strengthening activities, supply chains or financial management.²⁰⁵ Beneficiaries consistently reported receiving materials, training and other forms of assistance on time.²⁰⁶ WFP partnerships with local government and the private sector remain stable, further enhancing project implementation efficiency (see EQs 4.1 and 4.2).²⁰⁷

135. **Significant delays in project execution were rare.** The pandemic posed challenges for time-sensitive agricultural projects, delaying local government-led bidding processes for irrigation pipes in Jilin (Act 1).²⁰⁸ School feeding (Act 2) project management offices swiftly modified implementation, introducing the “school meals to take home” plan, ensuring that children continued to receive nutritional support and significantly increasing kindergarten attendance.²⁰⁹

136. **WFP China had to draw on its flexible funding to manage late payments from private donations.** Nutrition capacity building projects experienced late payments, prompting WFP China to temporarily rely on internal funds. However, overall, the office maintained relative funding stability thanks to consistent government support (EQ 4.1).²¹⁰ WFP and private sector partners reported that the slow pace of WFP headquarters’ legal reviews can hinder partnerships as agreements can take several months to complete. Private sector partners are used to moving much more quickly.²¹¹

137. **WFP China’s capacity to disburse funding aligned with global trends.** From July 2022 to December 2023, WFP China allocated 69 percent of its needs-based plan and 82 percent of its implementation plan (Table 21). This is in line with global averages (80 percent of implementation plans in 2020 and 93 percent in 2021). Partnerships (Act 3) had the highest disbursement rate (almost 100 percent), followed by value chains (Act 1) at 82 percent and preschool feeding (Act 2) at 75 percent. Expenditure and disbursement rates increased in 2023 after COVID-19 delays in 2022 but fell again in 2024 with the end of two preschool feeding and one value chains projects (Table 22).²¹²

Table 21: Allocated resources and expenditure as a percent of needs-based plan (USD) (July 2022 to Dec 2024)

Activity	Needs-based plan (USD)	Allocated resources (USD)	Expenditures (USD)	Allocated resources as % of NBP	Expenditures as % of allocated resources
Act 1: Value chains	3,807,324	2,235,262	1,760,740	59%	79%
Act 2: Preschool feeding	3,505,635	2,708,992	2,084,037	77%	77%
Act 3: Partnerships	1,115,105	1,457,707	833,990	131%	57%
TOTAL	8,428,064	6,401,960	4,678,767	76%	73%

Source: Cumulative financial overview as at 31 December 2024 (CN02), CBP Plan vs Actual Report (CN02), data extracted on 18 April 2025

²⁰⁵ ACR 2022. ACR 2023. KIIs with WFP staff (finance, procurement and communications) and Government of China August 2024, KIIs with PMOs and cooperatives, and FGDs with project beneficiaries, August to September 2024.

²⁰⁶ FGDs with project beneficiaries, Aug Sept 2024.

²⁰⁷ KIIs with private sector partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

²⁰⁸ KII with WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. KIIs with farmers, September 2024.

²⁰⁹ KII with WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. KIIs with farmers, September 2024.

²¹⁰ KIIs WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024.

²¹¹ KIIs with WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024.

²¹² Please note that for the years 2022 and 2023, information is available on available resources but not on allocated resources. Referring to the definition, available resources are not equal to allocated resources. Annualized available resources consist of the unspent balance of allocated contributions carried forward from the previous year, new allocated contributions, locally generated funds and other income and outstanding advances from internal lending facilities. Allocated resources refer to the cumulative value of allocated contributions and outstanding balances. KIIs with WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024.

Table 22: Available resources and expenditures by CSP activity (USD) (2022 to 2024)

Activity	2022			2023			2024		
	Available resources (USD)	Expenditures (USD)	Expenditures as % of available resources	Available resources (USD)	Expenditures (USD)	Expenditures as % of available resources	Available resources (USD)	Expenditures (USD)	Expenditures as % of available resources
Act 1: Value chains	689,779	521,957	76%	932,321	664,360	71%	1,048,945	574,423	55%
Act 2: Pre-school feeding	706,381	540,802	77%	900,686	533,840	59%	1,634,350	1,009,395	62%
Act 3: Partnerships	111,000	105,456	95%	447,888	446,767	100%	905,484	281,767	31%
Non-activity Specific	349,059	0	0%				943,426	0	0%
TOTAL	1,856,219	1,168,215	63%	2,280,895	1,644,967	72%	4,532,204	1,865,585	41%

Source: Cumulative financial overview as of 31 Dec 2024 (CN02), CBP Plan vs Actual Report (CN02), data extracted on 18 April 2025 Source: ACR 2022, 2023, and 2024, Cumulative Financial Overview as of 31 Dec 2023 (CN02), CBP Plan vs Actual Report (CN02), data extracted on 9 July 2024 and 20 April 2025

EQ 3.2 How relevant or useful was WFP technical assistance to the Government of China on targeting, and to what extent did it inform the Government's targeting practice?

Key finding 9: WFP China's strategy of working with provincial authorities to target the most vulnerable, pilot small scale approaches to address their needs then work with national authorities to bring effective approaches to scale is relevant to the China context, which includes large-scale investment in poverty alleviation and rural revitalization. WFP has been very effective in influencing targeting at the provincial level, including supporting local officials, academia and the private sector to broaden their understanding of inclusion and tailor approaches to the needs of vulnerable groups. However, WFP has not leveraged this experience to influencing national targeting, a crucial step if WFP is to move beyond small pilots and support solutions at scale.

138. **WFP China established a targeting strategy tailored to China's development context.** The 2022 targeting strategy emphasized supporting marginalized groups in impoverished counties previously identified by the Government. Decisions on support involved a multistakeholder consultation process, including MARA, relevant provincial governments, and donors. Selected regions featured a high proportion of smallholder farmers and hotspots from past poverty alleviation efforts. Provincial authorities consistently expressed appreciation for the holistic approach of WFP to development planning, highlighting its support to consider the engagement of marginalized groups, including women, smallholder farmers and left-behind children. Additionally, cultural considerations, such as local dialects, were addressed, with many promotional materials featuring local dialect voiceovers.²¹³

139. Site visits and interviews confirmed that WFP has successfully adapted its prioritization in response to changing needs and contexts. The selection of provinces and districts prioritized historically poor regions in western China, which have higher concentrations of left-behind children, ethnic minorities and impoverished populations. In China's agricultural development, the modernization process has often overlooked smallholder farmers. The domestic focus has primarily been on increasing agricultural efficiency through mechanization and large-scale operations. During the anti-poverty era, the Chinese Government emphasized supporting the most vulnerable smallholders to ensure they were not marginalized and could equally benefit from modern agricultural advancements. As the focus has shifted from poverty alleviation to rural revitalization and common prosperity, more attention is now being given to increasing the income of low-income individuals by enhancing their skills, as well as supporting the development of rural women and children.²¹⁴

²¹³ WFP China. Targeting Strategy for China CSP (2022–2025). December 2022. KII with PMOs and Government of China. Aug to Sept 2024. FGDs and site visits. Aug to Sept 2024.

²¹⁴ KIIs and FGDs with stakeholders, August–September 2024. KIIs with WFP staff (ACT1), August 2024. KIIs with FAO, August 2024. Kakwani, N., Wang, X., Xue, N., & Zhan, P. (2022). Growth and common prosperity in China. *China & World Economy*, 30(1), 28–57; Wang, G., Shi, X., & Golley, J. (2024). Feed the children, free the women? Evidence from the China rural nutrition improvement programme. *China Economic Review*, 102228.

140. **WFP has been successful in supporting provincial governments to target the most vulnerable.** Provincial government, academic and private sector partners particularly valued the focus of WFP on vulnerable groups and the rigour it brought to programme design and monitoring, reporting that this helped them to tailor support to key groups, complementing national and provincial development approaches focused on macro results, like increased production, introduction of new technology and infrastructure development.²¹⁵

141. However, the evaluation did not find strong evidence that WFP has influenced national targeting to the extent needed to take successful approaches to scale. Throughout the CSP, WFP has reached around 12,000 to 13,000 low-income individuals out of 40 million individuals targeted for social assistance by the Government of China, of whom 4.6 million are extremely disadvantaged.²¹⁶ The WFP strategy relies on piloting approaches, then engaging with decision makers to scale up successes into national programmes. However, short programme cycles, the lack of a clear understanding of the information needs and gaps of national decision makers and gaps in technical capacity are undermining WFP China's ability to generate convincing evidence to support engagement with national actors who have the capacity to scale up programmes (EQ 4.3). China's vast geography and the small scale of UN programming limits opportunities for UN agencies to coordinate to address unmet needs at the county level.²¹⁷

EQ 3.3 To what extent and how were WFP activities delivered in a cost-efficient manner?

Key finding 10: The cost efficiency of WFP activities, especially those related to school feeding and value chain support, showed notable improvement. Direct support costs are higher than WFP global average, but in line with other capacity strengthening-focused offices. WFP consistently achieved its targeted outputs with minimal losses or inefficiencies. However, a lack of cost benefit analysis and return on investment tracking makes it challenging to assess efficiency at the project level.

142. The cost efficiency of WFP activities, particularly those focused on school feeding and value chain support, improved during the evaluation period. Both national and provincial partners from the Government of China and private sector recognized the approach of WFP as cost-efficient, noting that: "WFP's relative efficiency in project execution and day-to-day operations offers a significant advantage over other international organizations."

143. China's direct support costs (DSC) as a percentage of total direct costs are higher than the WFP global average but align with other countries in Asia that focus on capacity strengthening. China's direct support costs as a percentage of total direct costs for 2022 to 2024 was 19.6 percent, above the global average of 4.3 percent (Table 23). However, this figure is broadly consistent with other capacity strengthening-focused countries in Asia, including Bhutan (13.7 percent), India (14.6 percent), Indonesia (25.1 percent), Nepal (12.5 percent) and the Philippines (10.4 percent).²¹⁸ China's relatively high share of direct support costs to total direct costs is explained by the small scale of China's direct activities, its focus on pilots, and the comparatively high wages and operating expenses compared to India, Nepal and the Philippines. Indirect support costs accounted for 15 percent of total costs in 2022 but sharply declined to 3.3 percent in 2023 and 1.7 percent in 2024 (below the global average), largely thanks to unspent funding due to COVID-19 in 2022, which was carried over to 2023 and 2024, with some allocated to indirect support costs. This also explains the high proportion of indirect support costs in 2022. The decrease in the ratio for

²¹⁵ KII with Government of China, PMO, academic, private sector partners, WFP China staff and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China ACR 2021, 2022, 2023.

²¹⁶ https://www.gov.cn/xinwen/jdzc/202310/content_6912006.htm.

²¹⁷ KII with WFP China staff, UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. Site visits to value chains and school feeding projects, Aug to Sept 2024.

²¹⁸ Calculations are based on the ACR 2023 of each country. Based on interviews with WFP China staff, one possible reason for the high DSC rate is that DSC can be understood as the country office's supporting cost, which is largely a fixed cost, such as rent, utilities, and personnel expenses. If the costs related to activities (the denominator) are relatively small, while the DSC (the numerator) remains relatively fixed, the DSC rate will be higher. This situation is likely more common in small offices.

2023 and 2024 may also be attributed to the need to allocate a portion of contributions to the Trust Fund, meaning that this part of the indirect support costs would not be reflected in the CSP.²¹⁹

Table 23: Direct and indirect support costs as a percentage of total cost (USD) (2022 to 2024)

	2022 (USD)	2023 (USD)	2024 (USD)	Total (USD)	Global average (2019-2022)
Total direct operational costs	1,168,215	1,644,967	1,865,585	4,678,767	
Direct support costs (DSC)	287,403	385,121	467,421	1,139,945	
Total direct costs	1,455,618	2,030,088	2,333,006	5,818,712	
Indirect support costs (ISC)	256,376	69,459	79,091	404,926	
Grand Total	1,711,994	2,099,547	4,745,104	12,042,351	
DSC as % Total direct costs	19.7%	19.0%	20.0%	19.6%	4.3%
ISC as % Total all costs	15.0%	3.3%	1.7%	3.4%	6.0%

Source: ACR 2022, 2023 and 2024, WFP, 2022, Evaluation of WFP's Policy on Country Strategic Plans

144. **WFP consistently met its targeted outputs with minimal losses or inefficiencies and within planned budgets.** WFP was able to deliver its activities and outputs within planned budgets, with the expenditure-to-implementation plan ratio ranging from 79 percent to 87 percent. The ratio for value chains (Act 1) remained stable, at around 70 percent in 2022 and 2023, before increasing to 80 percent in 2024. Preschool feeding (Act 2) expenditure dropped from 78 percent in 2022 to 55 percent in 2023 due to the conclusion of the Guangxi pilot project, before increasing to 98 percent in 2024. The ratio for partnerships (Act 3) increased significantly from 50 percent to 126 percent largely due to adjustments made to the CSP to remove South-South cooperation, finally settling at 72 percent in 2024 (Table 24).

Table 24: Expenditure (USD) as a percent of implementation plan by activity (2022 to 2024)

	2022			2023			2024		
Activity	Implementation plan (USD)	Expenditure (USD)	Expenditure as % of IP (USD)	IP	Expenditure (USD)	Expenditure as % of IP	IP	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of IP
Act 1: Value chains	746,969	521,957	70%	991,980	664,360	67%	717,030	574,423	80%
Act 2: School feeding	692,044	540,802	78%	970,502	533,840	55%	1,031,508	1,009,395	98%
Act 3: Partnerships	210,439	105,456	50%	355,344	446,767	126%	394,000	281,767	72%
Total Direct Operating Cost	1,649,451	1,168,215	71%	2,317,826	1,644,967	71%	2,142,538	1,865,585	87%
TOTAL	2,115,848	1,711,994	81%	2,643,638	2,099,547	79%	4,285,075	3,731,171	87%

Source: ACR 2022, 2023, and 2024, data extracted on 9 July 2024 and 20 April 2025

145. **The Jilin project (Act 1) faced several challenges, particularly concerning farmer income insurance.** It was anticipated that starting from the second year, the project would become more cost-efficient with farmers contributing to the costs. However, this did not materialize due to farmers' reluctance to participate. Additionally, some farmers have sold project-supplied equipment, such as pipes, either due to economic pressures or misunderstandings about ownership.²²⁰

146. In the school feeding activities, the balance between cost utilization and benefits in actual implementation reflects good efficiency. However, no systematic research has been conducted to quantify

²¹⁹ KII with WFP staff, Sept to Oct 2024.

²²⁰ FGD with Fuyu PMO, September 2024; FGD with Jilin PMO, September 2024.

the specific return on each dollar invested. While some studies suggest that every USD 1 invested in school meal programmes can yield a return of up to USD 16,²²¹ no in-depth analysis has been conducted for the WFP project specifically.²²² The complexity of calculating meal costs is further compounded by the diverse sources of kindergarten meal funding, particularly in the first phase. These sources include project subsidies, fees paid by parents for meals or living expenses, and portions of educational fees or other costs allocated by kindergartens for meal budgets. This makes it difficult to accurately determine the amount spent on providing meals, complicating any precise evaluation of meal costs and overall cost effectiveness.

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 country strategic plan?

EQ 4.1 To what extent has WFP sustained and enhanced its partnership with the Government of China (MARAs, the National Administration for Rural Revitalization) and other entities over the lifetime of the CSP 2022-2025, including with authorities at the decentralized (provincial) level, within the framework of the memorandum of understanding?

Key finding 11: The WFP memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs remains the backbone of WFP work in China. WFP improved partnerships with relevant authorities at the provincial level, but stakeholders see more opportunities to expand policy engagement with ministries such as Education and the National Health Commission at the national level. WFP has positioned itself as the largest recipient of multilateral humanitarian aid from China, with the relationship aiming to save lives and change lives

National partnerships

147. WFP China's national partnerships largely focused on three key agencies: MARA, CIDCA and CICETE, which are tasked with monitoring implementation of China's international development assistance. MARA continued to serve both as the most stable source of financial support for WFP China (see Table 17) and, as the "window ministry" for WFP, providing the legal basis and overall project supervision for WFP activities in China.²²³

148. WFP has forged a close relationship with CIDCA, China's development agency, receiving USD 161.4 million in funding since 2016.²²⁴ This makes WFP the largest recipient of Chinese multilateral funding from CIDCA. CIDCA staff value the focus by WFP on food security (CIDCA's top priority) and its global network and ability to deliver in challenging contexts²²⁵: "WFP is an excellent partner because it can connect resources within China and outside China... WFP has a huge network of country offices all over the world. They know the people; they know how to connect." Government official, Beijing, August 2024.

149. However, there are several key barriers to growing the relationship, including a USD 2 million limit on contracts, the ongoing perception of WFP as a "saving lives agency" and slow project approval times. WFP China must walk a careful line between finding responses that can make good use of smaller donations but still have the capacity to demonstrate results and can meet stringent Chinese standards. These standards include detailed reporting and a requirement to name precise food prices and volume, which often triggers renegotiation processes as COVID-19 and the Ukraine war drive unpredictable food price inflation.²²⁶ Funding received decreased sharply compared to the previous CSP. WFP received USD 19.8 million in funding from 2021 to 2024 compared to USD 141.6 million from 2016 to 2020 as CIDCA

²²¹ <https://www.firstthingsfirst.org/early-childhood-matters/investing-in-early-childhood/>.

²²² KIIs with WFP China staff, Aug and Sept 2024.

²²³ WFP China Country Strategic Plan (2022–2025). Presentation on Government Partnerships. Sept 2024. KIIs. WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024. Note Verbale. Permanent Representation of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024. Evaluation team of project design documents provided by WFP China.

²²⁴ CIDCA was founded in 2018, contributions for 2016 and 2017 were provided by MOFCOM.

²²⁵ WFP China ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. United Nations China Annual Results Report 2023 and 2024.

²²⁶ KII with WFP China, Government of China and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China presentation, Engagement with emerging donor China, August 2024.

diversified its funding across UN agencies, increased its focus on bilateral projects and introduced more stringent funding requirements.²²⁷ WFP China conducted multiple rounds of working-level engagements with CIDCA counterparts towards multiyear funding and innovative funding instruments such as debt swap, but the negotiation process is still ongoing at time of writing. WFP was able to negotiate a doubling of the USD 2 million cap on humanitarian projects in early 2025, highlighting the potential to work together to address barriers.²²⁸

150. Building on recommendations from the previous CSPE, WFP took several steps to strengthen government partnerships, including supporting field visits from MARA, CIDCA and CICETE to WFP projects in China, Kenya, Ethiopia and Guinea to build understanding of WFP capacity and approach.²²⁹

151. Representatives from the Government of China, United Nations agencies and research institutes told the evaluation team that WFP needed to increase its policy engagement with other ministries at the national level, particularly the Ministry of Education and the National Health Commission, to ensure that lessons from WFP-supported programmes can be integrated into national policies. This is a key step in creating plausible pathways from pilots to national scale-up (see EQ 2.3).²³⁰

Provincial partnerships

152. WFP expanded the breadth of its partnerships at the provincial level, based on recommendations from the previous evaluation and lessons from project implementation. WFP expanded beyond the Directorates of Agriculture, increasing the role of local education and health directorates and departments responsible for maternal and child health and local universities. The increased focus on interdepartmental coordination helped to strengthen project implementation, for example, by helping to address increases in obesity rates found in earlier preschool feeding programmes (see EQ 2.1, Act 2).

EQ 4.2 How well did WFP establish and leverage strategic and operational partnerships with the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other UN agencies, to maximize efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of interventions to address root causes of nutritionally vulnerable people in China?

Key finding 12: WFP has leveraged strong and mutually beneficial relationships with private sector partners and academia to promote innovative approaches to address poor nutrition and food insecurity, both in China and globally. However, over-reliance on private funding has at times driven geographic fragmentation and short term programming. WFP collaborates well with UN partners, but a lot of joint UN work remains at the level of information sharing and collaboration on strengthening policies and delivering advocacy campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism to End Violence against Women. The small scale and dispersed nature of UN projects in China means that joint programming is not feasible.

Private sector partnerships

153. Private partnerships have played a key role in sustaining WFP domestic programmes and driving innovation, but volatility and tight earmarking has contributed to fragmentation. Private partnerships were the main funding source for WFP domestic programmes in 2021 (USD 2.4 million) but dropped off sharply from 2022 due to economic slowdown and geostrategic shifts (Table 17, EQ 4.3).²³¹ Private partners included international companies, such as Cargill and Tek, which were interested in fulfilling their corporate social responsibility commitments in China and improving the quality of life of Chinese farmers working in their supply chains, and Chinese technology companies such as Alibaba and TenCent, which have an

²²⁷ Discussions with WFP China and Government of China staff at the stakeholder workshop, January 2025. WFP China Presentation on Government Partnerships, Sept 2024. Updated financial data provided by WFP China Deputy Director on 21 January 2025.

²²⁸ WFP. China Evaluation Actions, 19 June 2024. KII with WFP China and Government of China staff, Aug to Sept 2024

²²⁹ WFP China. ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. WFP China Presentation on Government Partnerships, Sept 2024. KIIs with WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. Note Verbale, Permanent Representation of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024. WFP. China Evaluation Actions, 19 June 2024.

²³⁰ KII with academic, Government of China and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team review of project designs shared by WFP China, Oct 2024. Evaluation team, reconstructed theory of change, 14 August 2024.

²³¹ KIIs with WFP China and private sector partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China programme data shared with the evaluation team on 26 September 2024 and MoUs between WFP China and MARA 2021 to 2024.

interest in leveraging digital innovation to improve humanitarian response in China and globally.²³² Private partners helped drive innovation, including introducing risk insurance, digital sales solutions and post-harvest storage technology for domestic programmes and support for digitalization, logistics and supply chain management at the global level. Private partners valued the global reputation of WFP, its ability to work effectively with the Chinese Government and its focus on vulnerable groups. Private partner interviewees have said that their own staff had gained a deeper understanding of international development, vulnerability and inclusion by working with WFP. Regular meetings between senior WFP and company decision makers, and WFP China's role in heading off and resolving cultural challenges, were cited as key factors for successful partnerships²³³: "Cultural differences are an unavoidable challenge in Sino-Western cooperation. The ability to coordinate through the China office was crucial in finding solutions. Our staff learned a lot about global humanitarian response." Private sector partner, Beijing, August 2024

154. However, private partnerships also contributed to geographic fragmentation, as partners often had specific people, groups or areas they wished to work with. This made it more challenging for WFP to find synergies across its programmes (see EQ 1.2).²³⁴ Due to economic instability, many private organizations were not able to continue their support beyond the initial three-year investment. Provincial authorities have had mixed success in sustaining these programmes without ongoing support (see EQ 2.2).²³⁵

Academic, media and non-governmental organization partnerships

155. WFP China expanded its partnerships with academic and media institutions, particularly at the provincial level, drawing on the recommendation of the previous CSPE. Increased academic partnerships brought benefits including more effective local solutions to improve nutrition and an increase in project evaluations and evidence generation, though a lack of technical expertise meant that it was often difficult for WFP to ensure the quality of evidence (see EQs 2.1 and 4.3). Expanded media partnerships helped raise the profile of WFP and supported private fundraising (see EQ 4.3).²³⁶ "WFP does a good job of telling the story of its work and projects, which helps to increase the organization's transparency and public participation." Private sector partner, Beijing, August 2024

156. As development in China is Government-led, WFP China did not have extensive engagement with non-government organizations. However, WFP collaborated with non-government organizations and foundations for fundraising (see EQ 4.3) and engaged with local women's federations, organizations of persons with disabilities and cooperatives through local projects (EQ 2.1 Act 1, EQ 2.4).²³⁷

United Nations partnerships

157. WFP collaborates well with United Nations agencies, but cooperation remains at the level of information sharing and preliminary cooperation.²³⁸ WFP contributes to UNSDCF results group 1 (people and prosperity), the programming, monitoring and evaluation group and cross-cutting theme groups on

²³² KIIs with private sector partners and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024.

²³³ KII with private sector partners, PMOs, academia, Government of China and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China Partnership Action Plan, Sept 2024. Site visits to preschool feeding and value chains projects, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China ACRs 2021, Jan to June 2022, July to Dec 2022, 2023.

²³⁴ UN. United Nations in China 2023 Annual Country Results Report, <https://china.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/United%20Nations%20in%20China%202023%20Annual%20Country%20Results%20Report.pdf>. WFP China. ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. KIIs. WFP China staff. Aug to Sept 2024.

²³⁵ WFP, Footprint of domestic programmes in China, 2024. KII with private sector partners, PMOs, academia, Government of China and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China Partnership Action Plan, Sept 2024. Site visits to preschool feeding and value chains projects, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024.

²³⁶ WFP China Partnership Action Plan, Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024. WFP China, Communications Advocacy and Media Support for CSP, shared Sept 2024. KII with WFP China staff, PMOs, academia, Aug to Sept 2024.

²³⁷ KII with PMO, WFP China and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024.

²³⁸ KII with UN partners, WFP China and headquarters staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP COE. Seminar on China-Africa Rice Value Chain. 8 July 2024, http://www.wfpchinacoe.net/2024-07/08/content_117296386.shtml.

gender, disability and leaving no one behind. WFP provided project lessons to inform the new UN common country analysis and gender strategies. UN agencies collaborate on awareness raising in Beijing, including International Women's Day and 16 Days of Activism on Preventing Violence against Women and are finalizing a standard operating procedure for inter-agency referral of preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. However, many UN stakeholders said there was scope to increase joint UN approaches to policy development at the national level.²³⁹ "A lot of UN collaboration is still at the level of preliminary information sharing." UN partner, Beijing, August 2024

158. Key informant interviews from FAO and IFAD reported that WFP work on nutrition-sensitive value chains complemented the focus of FAO on agricultural policy and technical support and the focus of IFAD on rural technology and value chains. The more traditional WFP value chains projects overlap somewhat with IFAD and FAO; however the organizations collaborate on project design and site selection to avoid duplication. WFP, IFAD and FAO have begun to collaborate on rice value chains. However, challenges aligning funding cycles, China's window ministry system, and the small scale of UN programmes limits opportunities for collaboration.²⁴⁰

EQ4.3 What role, if any, have the following factors played in the implementation of the CSP?: technical cooperation model with the Government of China; resourcing outlook and strategy; country office technical expertise capacity; and other internal or external factors?

Key finding 13: The division between the Centre of Excellence and the CSP from 2022 onwards made it more difficult to articulate a clear strategy for engagement and contributed to disconnect with WFP global technical approaches and systems, though recent efforts aim to bridge the gap. WFP partnership brokering capacity, combined with flexible, stable funding, is a key enabler of success. However, a lack of technical expertise has undermined the ability of WFP to generate evidence to scale up pilots into national policy

Strategic and institutional structure

159. The decision to split the Centre of Excellence for Enhancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTC) out of the CSP in 2022 was driven by disagreement among WFP Executive Board members on whether SSTC was an effective approach to development. However, the split contributed to a lack of strategic clarity²⁴¹ as the WFP domestic, international, South-South cooperation and humanitarian hub²⁴² activities were now split across multiple strategies and managed by different areas within headquarters. This made it more challenging to reach a common understanding on priorities and to report on progress and challenges in a holistic way, contributing to strategic confusion among staff and stakeholders.²⁴³ Removing South-South cooperation from the CSP also made China something of an outlier as most active WFP CSPs (87 percent) include South-South cooperation to some extent.²⁴⁴ To increase synergies, WFP China introduced an integrated organization chart in August 2024, however it is too early to assess its effectiveness.²⁴⁵

160. WFP China reports to WFP headquarters, not the regional bureau in Bangkok. This is partially historical, as WFP Rome led the restart of operations in 2015 following a ten-year gap, and partly reflects WFP China's global partnership functions. Given the China hybrid role of WFP, part country office and part

²³⁹ KII with UN partners and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024. WFP China ACRs 2021, 2022, 2023.

²⁴⁰ KII with UN partners and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024. WFP China ACRs 2021, 2022, 2023.

²⁴¹ KII with WFP, Government of China and UN stakeholders, Aug to Sept 2024.

²⁴² WFP, WFP launches a global humanitarian hub in China to support efforts against COVID-19, 30 April 2020, available at <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-launches-global-humanitarian-hub-china-support-efforts-against-covid-19>.

²⁴³ KII with WFP staff, Government of China, UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China, South-South Cooperation Knowledge Sharing, <http://www.wfpchinacoe.net/>, accessed 18 October 2024. WFP China, CSP 2022-2025 and 2017-2021. WFP China, ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. WFP China, South-South Cooperation Knowledge Sharing, <http://www.wfpchinacoe.net/>, accessed 18 October 2024. WFP China, CSP 2022-2025. WFP China, ACR 2021, 2022, 2023.

²⁴⁴ KII with WFP headquarters staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP South-South Cooperation Policy Update, Jan 2023. WFP, Fast Facts: South-South and Triangular Cooperation, June 2024.

²⁴⁵ WFP China Organigrams, Aug 2024, April 2024, Dec 2023, Nov 2022, Dec 2021. KII with WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024.

global partnerships office, there is likely no elegant solution. WFP China will need to continue to coordinate across both for the foreseeable future.²⁴⁶

Technical cooperation model

161. WFP has developed a strong technical cooperation model, optimized for the Chinese context. The model is not unique to WFP, but the Government, private sector and UN stakeholders acknowledge the particular strengths of WFP in partnership brokering.²⁴⁷

162. MARA provides strategic oversight, under the memorandum of understanding signed in 2016. Project design and county selection is led by WFP and the relevant Directorate of Agriculture, which then forms project management offices at the provincial and county levels to implement (Figure 5).

163. WFP supports project design, targeting and monitoring, with the Government of China providing 50 percent co-financing, usually in the form of in-kind staffing.²⁴⁸ WFP annual project review meetings bring country, provincial and national partners together to assess progress and address challenges.²⁴⁹

164. This arrangement is somewhat unusual. WFP often receives funding from the national Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) to implement projects through the provincial Directorate of Agriculture. However, provincial officials welcome the rigour that WFP brings to design and monitoring, its ability to convene different government departments, academia and the private sector and its focus on reaching vulnerable groups who may be left behind by national programmes. The international status of WFP and its focus on small-scale pilots also provides greater freedom to innovate.²⁵⁰

165. WFP reliance on Chinese academic institutions for project monitoring and evidence generation has helped to develop locally appropriate and sustainable solutions, particularly around preschool feeding (EQ 4.2 Act 2). However, the lack of in-house WFP technical expertise has prevented it from properly overseeing the design of evaluation methodologies, including sampling and selection of control groups, which has undermined the quality of results and missed opportunities to generate convincing evidence for national decision makers (see country office capacity below).²⁵¹

166. WFP held retreats in 2021 and 2024, bringing together 80 partners from the Government, UN, academia and the private sector from the national, provincial and county levels. These were a valued opportunity to exchange learning and build partnerships. The 2022 and 2023 retreats were cancelled due to COVID-19 and leadership changes.²⁵²

Resourcing outlook and strategy

167. The work of WFP has been fully funded by the Government of China and private sector funding has covered 92 percent of the WFP implementation plan, far above global averages (Table 3). Government funding has been highly predictable at around USD 1.3 million per year (fluctuating with exchange rates).

²⁴⁶ KII with WFP China and headquarters staff.

²⁴⁷ KII with Government of China, private sector, PMO and academic partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024.

²⁴⁸ Co-financing is an explicit condition of agreements signed between WFP and MARA. PMOs are required to report on co-financing in quarterly financial reports. The evaluation team did not review financial reporting to confirm that this was happening. However, project site visits suggested a heavy involvement of Government of China staff in project delivery, consistent with a 50% co-financing model. Co-financing continues a long-standing arrangement between WFP and China, see WFP Office of Evaluation, Evaluation of WFP's Assistance to China (1979-2005), WFP/EB.1/2006/7-A, 6 January 2006. KII with WFP China, Government of China and PMOs, Aug to Sept 2024. Site visits to preschool feeding and value chains projects, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team review of project designs and implementation plans provided by WFP China, Aug to Sept 2024.

²⁴⁹ Evaluation team review of Mission Reports provided by WFP China from April 2021 to May 2024. KII with WFP China, PMO, academia and private sector partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

²⁵⁰ KII with WFP China, Government of China, private sector, academia and PMOs, Aug to Sept 2024. Site visits to preschool feeding and value chains projects, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024.

²⁵¹ KIIs with academic partners and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team review of project evaluations provided by WFP China, Sept 2024.

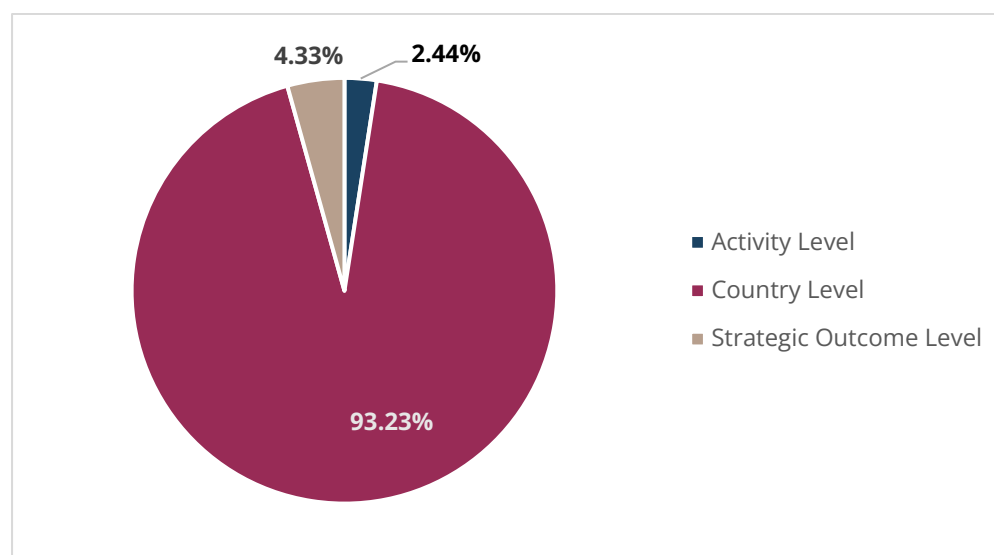
²⁵² WFP China, Retreat Summary Report, 2021 and 2024. Email, WFP programmes team, 14 June 2024. KIIs with WFP staff, UN partners, Government of China and private sector partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

Private fundraising has been more volatile, dropping sharply from a peak of USD 2.6 million in 2021 due to economic downturn and geostrategic uncertainty (Table 4).²⁵³

168. WFP China also raises funds on behalf of the WFP global programmes and South-South cooperation. For a full picture of WFP China's resource mobilization work, see EQ 2.1, Act 3.

169. **Donor contributions and earmarking:** WFP China's funding is highly flexible, with less than 3 percent earmarked to the activity level (Figure 18).

Figure 18: China CSP 2021-2024: Earmarked funding



Source: Distribution Contribution & Forecasts, data extracted on 12 February 2025

170. **There is significant scope to grow the partnership with China.** Chinese partners value the WFP global network of “boots on the ground” in crisis areas. The WFP mission of ending hunger is the top priority for China's multilateral development funding and its deeply personal for many government officials who experienced hunger in their childhood and still remember the large-scale support from WFP in the 1980s.²⁵⁴ Despite being the world's largest provider of development finance, and a growth trajectory to make China the world's largest economy, it does not yet feature in the top ten donors to WFP.²⁵⁵ Chinese companies and the public have likewise demonstrated a willingness to contribute to the fight against hunger, both in China and overseas.²⁵⁶ WFP China has begun exploring innovative financing solutions, including debt swap partnerships, but these discussions are in the early stages.²⁵⁷ “Chinese citizens have shown concern for children in need overseas. The Chinese market has the potential to provide more support for WFP programmes.” Private sector partner, Beijing, August 2024

Country office capacity

171. **WFP China generates a lot of evidence, just not always the right evidence.** WFP staff are highly skilled in partnership brokering. This is a key enabler in the success of the CSP (see EQs 4.1 and 4.2).

²⁵³ KII with private sector, WFP China and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024.

²⁵⁴ China was the largest recipient of WFP support in the 1980s. WFP China, ACR 2021, Jan to June 2022, July to Dec 2022, 2023. WFP China, Presentation on Government Partnerships, Sept 2024. KIIs with Government of China and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. Note Verbale, Permanent Representation of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Agencies for Food and Agriculture in Rome, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024.

²⁵⁵ Cameron Hill. China's aid. In DevPolicy Blog, Development Policy Centre, ANU, 24 October 2024. Dreher A, Fuchs A, Parks B, Strange A, Tierney MJ. *Banking on Beijing: The Aims and Impacts of China's Overseas Development Programme*. Cambridge University Press; 2022. WFP FACTory data, extracted 21 May 2024.

²⁵⁶ UN. United Nations in China 2023 Annual Country Results Report, <https://china.un.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/United%20Nations%20in%20China%202023%20Annual%20Country%20Results%20Report.pdf>. WFP China. ACR 2021, 2022, 2023. KIIs with WFP China, private sector and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

²⁵⁷ KII with WFP and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024.

However, WFP lacks technical expertise to oversee the robust data collection, peer reviewed papers and policy briefs needed to generate convincing policy evidence to scale up pilots into national programmes. WFP has not captured data on cost efficiency and return on investment.²⁵⁸ These are key metrics needed to convince policy makers to introduce new measures in a resource constrained environment. WFP China also greatly increased the number of project-level evaluations conducted during the period under evaluation. Most were impact evaluations; they had a control group to compare results against. This strongly aligns with the global focus of WFP on increasing the use of impact evaluations to generate credible evidence. However, the lack of in-house technical experts meant that WFP China was not always able to support provincial academic partners in addressing methodological challenges with sampling and selection of comparison groups. As a result, project evaluation results did not always fully reflect the likely impact of the project (EQ 2.1). The new WFP organization chart, launched in August 2024 includes dedicated evidence generation and knowledge management functions across both domestic and international programmes, but it is too early to assess its effectiveness.²⁵⁹ “WFP produces a lot of evidence, but it is not always the right evidence. WFP needs to focus on high impact peer reviewed papers.” UN partner, Beijing, August 2024

172. Following on from recommendations from the previous CSPE evaluation, WFP has increased its public communications, including supporting a livestream cooking event under the zinc-enriched potato event, which was viewed by 649,000 people.²⁶⁰

173. The perception that China is a unique context, combined with a convoluted structure has prevented WFP China from fully leveraging lessons and technical approaches from WFP globally and from country capacity strengthening-focused offices in Asia.²⁶¹ Headquarters recently funded a visit by WFP China staff to Rome, which identified significant opportunities to align approaches and systems, suggesting there are opportunities for more engagement and cross learning.²⁶²

174. WFP China has benefited from stable staffing of around 35 staff over the CSP period supporting the CSP, global partnerships, South-South cooperation and some shared services with the WFP Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) programme. WFP invests comparatively less in private fundraising, three staff dedicated, than other UN agencies but is not currently tracking data on return on investment, which could help optimize investment in different fundraising options.²⁶³

²⁵⁸ KIIs with academic partners and WFP China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team review of project evaluations provided by WFP China, Sept 2024. Decentralized Evaluation Report for the Impact Evaluation of the Preschool Nutrition Pilot in Selected Counties of Xiangxi Prefecture, Hunan, PR China. Available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/china-preschool-nutrition-pilot-selected-countries-china-feb-2018-jan-2021-evaluation-basel>.

²⁵⁹ WFP China Organigrams, Aug 2024, April 2024, Dec 2023, Nov 2022, Dec 2021. KII with WFP China, PMOs, academic and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. Evaluation team analysis of project level evaluations provided by WFP China, Sept 2024. WFP, Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019 to 2026). WFP Impact Evaluation Forum, 4-7 December 2023, website accessed 4 November 2024.

²⁶⁰ KII. Private sector partner. Sept and Oct 2024.

²⁶¹ KIIs with WFP headquarters staff and Government of China, June, Aug and Sept 2024. Sophie Dunn, Gerardo Sanchis Munoz and Belinda Chanda. Review: WFP's Capacity Strengthening Support to National Systems and Actors: Asia and the Pacific, March 2024.

²⁶² KII with WFP headquarters and China staff, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP, Briefing of Domestic Programme for CSPE (2022-2025), 3 June 2024.

²⁶³ KII with WFP China, headquarters and UN partners, Aug to Sept 2024. WFP China Organigrams, Aug 2024, April 2024, Dec 2023, Nov 2022, Dec 2021.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1 Conclusions

Conclusion 1: WFP is providing relevant assistance as China shifts its focus from poverty alleviation to rural revitalization. There is a clear case for WFP to support China to finish the development journey and transition towards a post CSP partnership.

175. Since the beginning of the partnership in 1978, the approach of WFP has evolved alongside China's dramatic development, transitioning from large-scale emergency food aid – the largest WFP global operation during the 1980s – to today's focus on niche capacity support for nutrition and value chains.

176. WFP has responded flexibly to China's evolution from poverty alleviation to rural revitalization over the past five years, supporting provincial authorities to identify vulnerable children, women and elderly smallholder farmers and integrate them into national approaches to ensure no one is left behind. The focus by WFP on mentoring and training for provincial nutrition programmes for children aged 3 to 5 years filled a gap in government and UN development strategies.

177. WFP has built a responsive, timely, cost-effective cooperation model, which is valued by the Government of China and private sector partners alike. The national Government values the global network of WFP in crisis countries and its long history in China. Provincial authorities value the ability of WFP to forge broad partnerships across departments, the private sector and academia, and its inclusive approach to programme design, monitoring and targeting. Private sector partners value the global reputation of WFP and its ability to work effectively with the Government.

178. The fight against hunger is both a core policy commitment and deeply personal for many Chinese officials, who experienced hunger in their childhood. There is a strong case for WFP to support China in finishing the development journey and strong potential to grow the partnership, enlisting China as an increasingly important ally in the global fight to end hunger. As China continues to develop, CSPs will become less appropriate as a mechanism for engagement.

Conclusion 2: WFP has contributed to stronger individual and organizational capacity at the provincial level but missed opportunities to leverage learning from its provincial-level pilots to generate credible and relevant evidence to inform policies at the national level and ensure that its concept testing and pilot approaches had a realistic pathway to scale.

179. WFP made progress in supporting increased individual and organizational capacity at the provincial level through mentoring and training. Partners increased their capacity in project design and monitoring, and inclusive targeting approaches, which allowed them to develop and test new solutions to deliver nutrition support to preschool children and build incomes, climate resilience and market linkages for smallholder farmers, including women, elderly and farmers from minority communities. The ability of WFP to forge closer engagement and coordination across different government departments, communities, the private sector and academia was a driver of innovation.

180. The WFP approach to working with provincial partners to pilot and test approaches that can be scaled up at the national level was a sound strategy. China's government-led development approach, and the sheer number of people and vast geographies involved, means that only national authorities have the reach, capacity and resources to deliver solutions at scale. Authorities also have a track record of piloting approaches at the provincial level before rolling out successes regionally or nationwide.

181. However, WFP is yet to see any evidence of uptake at the national or regional levels. WFP China lacks a clearly articulated pathway for how its pilots can influence national decision making, including understanding the information needs and gaps of decision makers. This makes it difficult to mobilize provincial, national and international partners to take pilots to scale.

Conclusion 3: WFP China delivers a lot of evidence, but not the types of evidence needed to convince the government to scale up a pilot project. Key gaps include limited evidence of cost-benefit and return on investment. WFP greatly increased the number of project-level evaluations, building on the recommendation of the previous CSPE. However, a lack of in-house technical expertise limited the ability of WFP to develop convincing evidence for national-level project scale-up.

182. Delivering on the recommendations from the previous evaluation (October 2020), WFP increased the volume and type of evidence it produced, partnering with media to deliver creative outreach, such as a livestream cooking show to showcase zinc-enriched potatoes and launching the South-South knowledge hub (outside the CSP but showcasing some CSP projects).

183. WFP increased the number of project-level evaluations it conducted with provincial academic partners. This improved project learning, strengthening approaches to address obesity and dental caries and building sustainable local capacity in social and behaviour change communication and inclusion. However, the lack of WFP in-house technical expertise, combined with the failure to plan scale-up strategies from the beginning of project design, contributed to missed opportunities to collect key evidence, such as cost-benefit analyses and return on investment.

184. Without technical experts, WFP was unable to support research partners in ensuring robust data collection methodologies. This meant that evidence did not always accurately reflect programme achievements and was not always suitable for policy engagement. Partners believe that WFP needs more robust peer reviewed policy evidence that is convincing for decision makers. Weak links to headquarters and the regional bureau, and a sense that the China context was unique, also acted as barriers to leveraging technical expertise from the global WFP partnership.

Conclusion 4: WFP was effective in influencing targeting towards the most vulnerable, but its more progressive approaches to women's empowerment did not make it from paper to practice.

185. The WFP Targeting Strategy 2022, combined with strong partnership brokering approaches, allowed WFP to work effectively with provincial partners to identify and engage vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind by national development, including women, girls, elderly farmers, people with disability and minorities. This serves as a model for future inclusion work in China, for example on community feedback mechanisms.

186. WFP worked with provincial partners to achieve near gender parity in capacity strengthening activities. However, WFP missed the opportunity to embed progressive approaches to women's empowerment into design and implementation, including supporting tailored approaches to address underlying gender power imbalances and increase access to assets, finance and decision making for rural women and people with disabilities. UN partners value WFP insights on economic opportunities for rural women, highlighting the potential for WFP to do more in this area.

187. WFP developed strong capacity strengthening approaches to climate-resilient agriculture, environmental sustainability and nutrition integration, which it can leverage for future programmes.

Conclusion 5: Geographic dispersion and short funding cycles made it harder to demonstrate sustainable results and achieve synergies across the different areas of WFP work

188. WFP partnerships with private partners was a key driver of innovation, helping to introduce new approaches to marketing, risk insurance and post-harvest storage. However, the need to align with the interest of private partners meant WFP projects were disbursed across a large geographic area. WFP worked hard to promote synergies across its different areas of capacity support, but the vast distances meant that links were often one off.

189. Economic instability means that many private partners can only fund projects for three years. This is not long enough to support provincial capacities to test innovative new projects, learn, adapt and refine approaches and engage with national actors to take successful pilots to scale. Allowing sufficient time to pilot approaches, learn and adapt is a key factor in effective and sustainable capacity strengthening approaches. Provincial governments have done a good job maintaining many interventions, but short-term project cycles threaten sustainability and effectiveness.

Conclusion 6: Fragmented strategy has made it more challenging to set a clear strategic trajectory to grow the relationship and demonstrate sustainable results

190. The hybrid role of WFP China, part country office, part global office, part Centre of Excellence, means that there is no perfect strategic model. However, the decision to split South-South cooperation from the CSP in 2022, and the fact that the humanitarian hub, another significant area of engagement, sits outside the CSP contributed to fragmented reporting lines, staff confusion and strategic drift. This made it more challenging for WFP China to articulate its strategic opportunities and challenges and leverage its significant global, national and provincial networks to grow the partnership in line with China's increasing global presence.

3.2 Recommendations

191. The evaluation makes three operational and two strategic recommendations to address key issues for future WFP engagement with China on domestic and global programmes. Recommendations 1 and 5 apply to both domestic and global WFP programmes. Recommendation 2 applies to global partnerships. Recommendations 3 and 4 apply to domestic WFP programmes (see table below).

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 1: Use the next CSP to articulate a pathway by which WFP can transition to a relationship with China that goes beyond the term of the CSP and is in line with China's post-2030 development agenda.	Strategic, domestic and global	Country office	Multilateral and Programme Country Partnerships Division, country office South-South cooperation unit, and Supply Chain and Delivery Division	High	November 2025
1.1 Provide a holistic vision for WFP's engagement in China, focusing on the "leave no one behind" agenda, and covering domestic and international programmes and the centre of excellence so as to promote strategic clarity and synergies among programmes.				High	November 2025
1.2 Conduct an independent evaluation of the centre of excellence to provide a basis for setting realistic targets and integrating the centre into WFP's broader strategy for its work in China.				Medium	June 2026
1.3 Focus WFP's efforts in China on the development of comprehensive nutrition-focused, climate-smart and risk-resilient food systems.				High	November 2025
1.4 In the next CSP, embed an ambitious vision of how to grow the partnership with China as an enabler of achievements under the CSP. This will remove the need to include partnerships as a stand-alone area of activity in the next CSP.				Medium	November 2025

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
Recommendation 2: Set out an ambitious strategy for growing WFP and China's partnership to address zero hunger worldwide, in line with SDG 2 and commensurate with China's increasing global presence.	Strategic and global partnerships	Country office	Multilateral and Programme Country Partnerships Division; Private Sector Corporate Partnerships Unit	Medium	June 2026
2.1 Develop a three-phase engagement strategy for building partnerships with the Government by demonstrating results to show that WFP can deliver; expanding the focus of partnerships beyond food assistance to include food solutions; and working with China to secure more funding, including more multi-year funding, based on shared areas of interest.				Medium	June 2026
2.2 Strengthen the country office's partnership brokering capacity by identifying and developing appropriate initiatives for building the global partnership between WFP and China on achieving zero hunger.				High	June 2026
2.3 Test the effectiveness of increasing investment in private fundraising initiatives, track the returns on investment, and build evidence of the optimal levels of investment.				High	June 2026
Recommendation 3: Increase the duration and tighten the geographic focus of CSP programmes in China, and bring together successes from past pilot projects into a comprehensive package of support.	Operational and domestic programmes	Country office		Medium	January 2026
3.1 Pilot the use of a ten-year project design cycle. Three years is a too short period for implementing				Medium	December 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
a pilot project, learning from it, and demonstrating the results.					
3.2 Pilot area-based programming. Combine successful approaches and learning from past programmes into a holistic, geographically focused package of support that promotes synergies among nutrition, value chain and climate smart approaches.				Medium	December 2026
3.3 Blend public and private financing with a view to increasing the predictability of financing for projects.				High	June 2026
3.4 Develop detailed scale-up plans during project design and review and update them annually.				High	January 2026
Recommendation 4: Develop approaches for sustainable change towards gender equality and women's empowerment to address underlying imbalances and improve women's leadership, resources and finance; include people with disabilities in project design, and integrate end-user feedback tailored to conditions in China.	Operational and domestic programmes	Country office	Gender, Protection and Inclusion Service	Medium	September 2025
4.1 Develop a tailored strategy for identifying opportunities to address underlying imbalances and promote gender-transformative approaches that foster women's leadership, control over resources and assets, and access to financing.				High	September 2025
4.2 Consult organizations of people with disabilities and women's organizations during project design and monitoring.				High	June 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
4.3 Develop targeted approaches to ensure that project designs are suitable for older people, who make up an increasing proportion of China's rural population. Collect age-disaggregated data, building on the successful approach to the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data under the previous CSP.				Medium	June 2026
4.4 Test approaches appropriate to conditions in China to ensure that the end-users of projects can provide feedback, and lessons can be used to improve delivery.				Medium	December 2026
Recommendation 5: Invest in the capacity of the WFP country office in China to generate credible evidence as a basis for decision-making in relation to efforts to strengthen food security and nutrition in China and around the world.	Operational, domestic and global	Country office	Multilateral and Programme Country Partnerships Division	High	June 2026
5.1 Complement WFP's partnership brokering skills with collaboration with technical experts to support the gathering and use of robust data; the preparation of peer reviewed policy papers; and engagement with experts and decision-makers on domestic and international approaches to strengthening food security and nutrition.				High	June 2026
5.2 Measure cost-efficiency and returns on investment to provide credible evidence as a basis for the development of effective and sustainable approaches to improving nutrition and food security.				High	June 2026

Recommendations and sub-recommendations	Recommendation type	Responsible WFP offices and divisions	Other contributing entities	Priority	Deadline for completion
5.3 Build a robust knowledge management system for capturing and disseminating evidence and lessons for use in domestic and international programmes.				High	December 2026

Office of Evaluation

World Food Programme

Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70,
00148 Rome, Italy - T +39 06 65131

wfp.org/independent-evaluation