



World Food Programme

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Evaluation of China Country Strategic Plan 2022–2025

CONTEXT

Over the past 40 years, more than 800 million people in China have been lifted out of poverty, with extreme poverty eradicated in 2020. However, income disparities remain. Approximately a quarter of the population (24.7%) is estimated to be living on less than USD 6.85 per day, and poverty rates in rural areas were three times higher than those in urban areas.

Following the eradication of extreme poverty, national priorities have shifted toward rural revitalization. China's rural areas are largely composed of smallholder farmers who face low incomes, limited technology, weak market links, and inadequate financial support.

In this context, China's efforts have focused on sustaining food security, preventing a return to poverty, and improving rural infrastructure and governance.

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 both 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.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF EVALUATION

WFP has been working in China since 1969 and WFP's programme in China was WFP's largest in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since then, WFP's partnership with the Government has evolved with China's socioeconomic transformation.

The WFP China Country Strategic Plan (CSP, 2022–2025) was approved by the Executive Board in June 2022 and started in July 2022. The previous CSP (2017–2021) was extended for the first six months of 2022 to cover the gap and allow for additional deliberation on the new strategy.

The WFP China country office works solely through country capacity strengthening; there are no cash-based transfers or

food distributions. The CSP is fully funded by the Government of China and the Chinese private sector.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

Evaluations serve the dual objectives of accountability and learning. As such, the evaluation of the China CSP provided evaluation evidence and learning on WFP's performance for country-level strategic decisions, specifically for developing the future engagement of WFP in China, and provided accountability for results to WFP stakeholders.

The evaluation covered the interventions implemented by WFP under the CSP for China 2022–2025 and covered the period from November 2020 to September 2024, which was the cut-off date for data collection.

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.

SUMMARY OF KEY CONCLUSIONS AND INSIGHTS

1. Relevance and alignment

The WFP China CSP effectively addressed root causes of food insecurity through targeted livelihoods and nutrition interventions in poor provinces, focusing on vulnerable groups like smallholder farmers and children left behind. The CSP aligned well with national priorities and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, complementing agencies like FAO, IFAD, and UNICEF.

WFP's preschool feeding programmes addressed policy gaps for children aged 3–5. Its evolving approach remained relevant through China's shift to rural revitalization and responded flexibly to COVID-19 and funding challenges. However, the split between the CSP and Center of Excellence post-2022 limited synergies and reduced strategic coherence.

2. WFP's partnership model

WFP's capacity strengthening efforts improved partners' skills in project design, monitoring, and inclusive targeting, enabling innovative solutions for nutrition, climate resilience, and market access for vulnerable farmers. Its memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Agriculture anchors national work, while partnerships expanded at the provincial level to include health and education sectors.

WFP fostered strong ties with academia and the private sector to drive innovation, although reliance on private funding sometimes led to fragmented, short-term efforts. While collaboration with UN partners is strong in advocacy and policy, joint programming remains limited due to the small-scale and scattered nature of UN projects in China.

3. Evidence generation and use

WFP's strategy in China focused on piloting innovative interventions and scaling successful ones through engagement with decision-makers. During the CSP, WFP expanded its evidence base, conducting evaluations with academic partners and launching creative outreach, like a livestream cooking show. However, limited in-house technical expertise and lack of early scale-up planning led to missed opportunities to collect critical data, such as cost-benefit analyses.

Methodological gaps weakened the policy relevance of some evidence. Weak links to WFP's global expertise and insufficient understanding of national stakeholders' evidence needs further limited impact, hindering efforts to scale programmes and influence policy effectively.

4. Targeting and prioritization

WFP's 2022 Targeting Strategy enabled effective collaboration with provincial partners to reach vulnerable groups, including women, elderly farmers, minorities, and people with disabilities, setting a strong model for future inclusion. It improved local targeting approaches and gender parity in capacity building but missed opportunities to influence national strategies and embed women's economic justice more deeply. People with disabilities were included but not fully engaged in project design or monitoring. While WFP advanced environmental sustainability and nutrition integration, it underutilized its experience to push for scalable feedback mechanisms and broader systemic change, limiting its impact beyond pilot-level interventions.

5. Sustainability of results and synergies across the full portfolio

The evaluation found mixed sustainability outcomes in WFP's activities. Nutrition projects showed stronger sustainability due to effective Social Behaviour Change Communication and local capacity-building, while value chain projects faced barriers like short cycles, market risks, and climate impacts. Private funding peaked in 2021 but declined sharply, with short funding cycles undermining long-term results. Limited branding, planning, and evidence also hindered national scale-up.

Alignment with private sector interests led to geographically dispersed projects, reducing synergies and sustainability. Some partnerships, like with smallholder farmers supplying school programmes, showed promise but were not sustained after WFP support ended, highlighting challenges in securing lasting impact and funding.

6. Strategic direction

WFP China's hybrid role – as a country office, global office, and Centre of Excellence – has created challenges in strategic coherence. The 2022 split between the CSP and Centre of Excellence led to fragmented priorities, weakened alignment with global systems, and limited synergy between domestic and international programmes. Key opportunities, such as showcasing preschool feeding work through South-South platforms, were missed. The separation caused confusion among staff and partners and made China an outlier among WFP CSPs. An integrated organizational chart was introduced in 2024 to improve coordination, but its effects are still unclear.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation makes five recommendations to WFP:

Recommendation 1. Use the next CSP to articulate a pathway to transition to a post-CSP relationship with China in line with the post-2030 development agenda.

Recommendation 2. Set out an ambitious strategy to grow the WFP-China partnership to address zero-hunger globally commensurate with China's increasing global presence.

Recommendation 3. Increase the length and tighten the geographic focus of CSP programs. Bring together successes from past pilots into a comprehensive package of support.

Recommendation 4. Develop women's empowerment approaches to address underlying imbalances, improve women's leadership, resources and finance. Include people with disabilities in project design and integrate end user feedback tailored to the Chinese context.

Recommendation 5. Invest in WFP China's capacity to generate credible evidence for decision making on strengthening food security and nutrition in China and globally.