



Summary of Evaluation Report: Thematic Evaluation of WFP's Country Capacity Strengthening Activities in Lesotho (2019 to 2023)

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the key findings, lessons, and recommendations from the thematic evaluation of the World Food Programme (WFP)'s country capacity strengthening (CCS) activities in Lesotho from 2019 to 2023. The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Lesotho country office and conducted by an independent evaluation team contracted through the KonTerra Group. The Kirkpatrick model was used to assess capacity strengthening across four levels: reaction (satisfaction), learning, behaviour, and results (organizational change). Primary qualitative and quantitative data collection was conducted between September and October 2023.

SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

WFP's engagement in Lesotho began in 1962, evolving from direct implementation to a focus on strengthening government institutions' capacity to promote food and nutrition security. This evaluation covers CCS activities under the 2019–2024 Country Strategic Plan (CSP), where capacity strengthening was the main approach for CSP Activities 2 to 6. CCS strategies were based on

capacity needs mapping and structured around five pathways:

1. Policy and legislation
2. Institutional effectiveness and accountability
3. Strategic planning and financing
4. Stakeholder programme design and delivery
5. Engagement and participation of non-governmental actors

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was timed to inform the design of the new CSP (2024–2029), with dual objectives of accountability and learning, and a greater emphasis on learning. The evaluation was specifically commissioned to:

- Assess the effectiveness of CCS interventions
- Recommend programme adjustments
- Assess CCS activity consideration of environmental risk and gender-related issues
- Supplement evidence on the capacity of the Government and partners to achieve zero hunger

Reference:

Full evaluation reports and the Management Response are available at [https://www.wfp.org/publications/Lesotho Country Capacity Strengthening Evaluation](https://www.wfp.org/publications/Lesotho%20Country%20Capacity%20Strengthening%20Evaluation). For more information, please contact the Office of Evaluation wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org

SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

RELEVANCE

CCS activities are highly relevant to the national development priorities, contextual realities, and the needs of vulnerable populations in Lesotho. Strengthening national systems for early warning, vulnerability assessment, and food security monitoring was also highly relevant. Environmental risk analysis further strengthened the contextual relevance of the CCS activities. However, capacity gaps in crisis response planning and implementation remained unaddressed.

The participatory and inclusive approach ensured equal opportunities and community engagement. Participants expressed satisfaction with the design, particularly its gender responsiveness and integration of environmental risk analysis. Gender analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of women's challenges, though it offered limited insights into age-specific needs. The inclusion of persons with disabilities was also limited.

School feeding emerged as a highly relevant CCS component, serving as a critical social protection mechanism supporting education, nutrition, and local economic development. The goal to ensure full national ownership of the home-grown school feeding programme (HGSF) was appropriate, given the government's dedicated commitment. However, capacity gaps in management, monitoring, evaluation, and local procurement systems persisted, underscoring the need for continued institutional strengthening.

Promoting nutrition, soil and water conservation, and improved smallholder market access is essential to addressing Lesotho's interconnected challenges. The creation and rehabilitation of soil and water conservation assets is relevant given the increased frequency of drought and floods and the effects of soil erosion, desertification, and reduced soil fertility on agricultural production. Market interventions targeting smallholder farmers are relevant due to low productivity, high post-harvest losses, and limited market opportunities on agriculture value chains.

COHERENCE

CCS activities are strategically coherent with both national and organizational priorities, aligning with frameworks such as the National Strategic Development Plan II (NSDP II), the National Social Protection Strategy (2021–2031), the Food and Nutrition Policy (2016–2025), and the National Strategic Resilience Framework (2019–2030). A minor inconsistency was noted in the updated school feeding policy, which assigned WFP a broader role than outlined in the CSP, particularly on school feeding infrastructure and vegetable gardens.

CCS activities demonstrated strong internal and thematic coherence through integrated interventions in nutrition, climate change adaptation, and social protection. Nutrition clubs and climate-smart agricultural practices promoted coherence between food security, environmental sustainability, and resilience outcomes. The evaluation team observed geographical convergence of different CSP activities in the field, though the extent to which this convergence is strategically initiated is unclear. If realised, these synergies could allow for a mutual contribution to the crosscutting themes and their respective outcomes.

EFFICIENCY

Resource availability: Resource availability was relatively high and did not constitute a major constraint, although some activities experienced funding shortfalls. Resource mobilization varied across activities and years, with expenditures generally lower than allocations and, in most cases, below needs-based plans due to limited implementation capacity.

While there were no significant challenges related to resource adequacy, opportunities remain for improving resource efficiency. **Efficiency could be improved by designing strategies that account for institutional dynamics** especially in contexts of high staff turnover. Expanding alternative CCS modalities and adopting mitigation measures could help sustain capacity gains more efficiently. Delays in food supply and low NMA payment rates underscore the need for private sector involvement in school feeding financing.

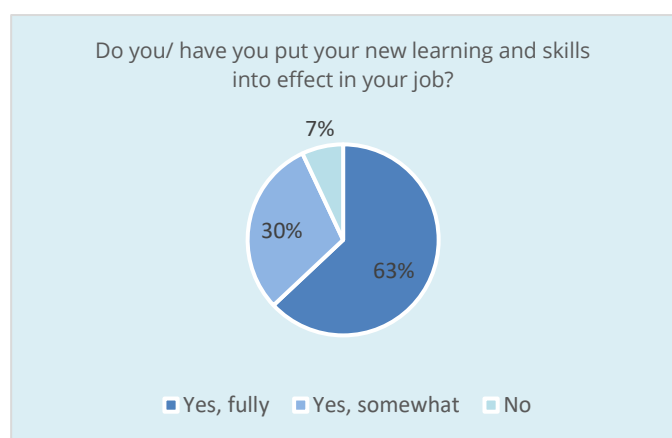
Reference:

Full evaluation reports and the Management Response are available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/lesotho-national-school-feeding-programme-evaluation>
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EFFECTIVENESS

WFP's CCS activities were generally effective and well received. Most respondents expressed satisfaction with the quality of training, technical assistance, and logistics. Over 90% of participants reported applying new knowledge and skills (Figure 1), leading to organizational improvements. However, time constraints reduced the depth of learning and practical application for some participants, particularly among school feeding committees.

Figure 1: Extent to which new learning has been put into effect, according to survey participants



School Feeding: WFP made significant progress in providing training, policy support, and technical assistance, including policy review, development of monitoring frameworks, and strengthening of smallholder farmer and committee capacities. However, these efforts had not yet translated into visible improvements in programme performance due to institutional and leadership challenges. The quality of school meals deteriorated after handover to the government, highlighting ongoing financial and technical support needs.

Food security monitoring and early warning systems: WFP enhanced government institutions' technical capacity for seasonal forecasts, LVAC assessments, and preparedness mechanisms. However, the use of early warning data for anticipatory or mitigation actions remained limited, indicating a gap between information generation and its operational use for disaster response.

Nutrition: WFP exceeded expectations, implementing both planned and additional initiatives, including food fortification legislation, support to NGOs, and contributions to the Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) strategy and National Food and Nutrition Strategy. WFP improved government coordination, planning, and community engagement through nutrition clubs, with early signs of positive outcomes at the field level.

Resilience and market interventions demonstrated mixed results. For resilience, WFP contributed to new policy frameworks, guidelines, and participatory planning processes, though ownership and integration across ministries remained limited. Innovative public works guidelines and seasonal livelihood planning tools were piloted but they showed uneven adoption. Market interventions progressed in strengthening smallholder farmer capacities, but outcomes were still emerging. The support to livelihood diversification, home gardening, poultry and pig breeding, and food fortification enhanced dietary diversity and community resilience. Overall, WFP has laid strong foundations across all CCS pathways, despite the critical challenges related to institutional uptake, endorsement of key policies, and sustained implementation.

IMPACT

CCS effectively addressed the food insecurity, malnutrition, environmental degradation, and gender inequity challenges. Technical support to the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC) improved analytical capacity and the development of anticipatory action mechanisms. The inclusion of seasonal forecasting enhanced preparedness and decision-making. WFP's support of nutrition clubs and community-based resilience activities strengthened access to food and diet diversification among participating households. However, there were few observable impacts in terms of improved government and stakeholder programming.

SUSTAINABILITY

Gaps remained in addressing institutional capacity, financing mechanisms, and governance structures critical to sustaining programme benefits beyond WFP's direct support. The development of CCS strategies in

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December 2022 introduced a more structured framework for sustainability, but these strategies had not yet been operationalized, limiting their impact on strengthening national ownership.

Persistent budget shortfalls and leadership challenges threatened the sustainability of school feeding. While the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) assumed management responsibility for some schools, signalling progress toward ownership, the lack of leadership within the HGSP programme threatens long-term sustainability.

High staff turnover and limited ownership at various levels undermined the sustainability of early warning, nutrition, and public works. High staff turnover within the Disaster Management Authority (DMA) affected institutional ownership. Weak leadership and frequent turnover at the district level hindered sustainability of nutrition programming. Limited ownership and inadequate technical assistance reduced the durability of assets created under public works programmes, though some participants reinvested income into productive livelihoods.

GENDER

WFP effectively integrated Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) principles into CCS activities, based on sound gender analysis. The organization promoted GEWE within government programming and national regulations. However, the specific needs of different age groups and persons with disabilities were not sufficiently addressed, particularly regarding equitable access to education.

WFP interventions strengthened women's participation in decision-making and economic activities. Women in households receiving WFP transfers reported increased involvement in household decisions, improved access to assets, and greater capacity to manage livelihoods. Community-based and public works activities provided equal opportunities for women, including access to land. However, women's representation on school feeding committees did not consistently translate into meaningful participation in management roles.

Promotion of Gender Parity and Inclusive Engagement:

WFP's initiatives promoting men's exposure to nutrition messaging and fostering gender parity in resilience-building activities have contributed to shifting social norms, advancing gender equality and promoting shared responsibility in community development.

FACTORS AFFECTING RESULTS

Internal factors

- Proactive collaboration with government, UN agencies, academia, and private sector partners facilitated expertise mobilization, resource sharing and enhanced visibility of WFP's CCS activities. However, most collaborations were not formalized due to changes in leadership and ownership issues.
- The limited use of WFP corporate technical resources, and tools affected the implementation of M&E processes due to insufficient technical support to transition from direct implementation.
- The absence of a formal operational plan and unclear prioritization hindered coordination and progress tracking. Additionally, limited stakeholder understanding of CCS systems and inadequate monitoring mechanisms weakened evidence-informed decision-making and reduced programme coherence.
- Monitoring, and evaluation: Indicators used were not suitable for assessing CCS effectiveness. Later-introduced reporting tools were disconnected from planning frameworks, preventing effective measurement of progress.

External factors

- The frequent staff changes resulting from high turnover in government institutions at the high political level affected the continuity of processes, capitalization of efforts and ultimately the achievement of CCS outcomes.
- Limited government financial capacity: Investments in CCS activities often present new tools and processes that require dedicated staff, and resources and often additional costs beyond government capacity.
- Leadership and ownership: Limited leadership in disaster response planning and absence of a dedicated school feeding secretariat resulted in implementation challenges.

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SUMMARY OF EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Continue transitioning to a holistic approach** to supporting national systems, operationalizing CCS strategies, and engaging stakeholders. Additionally, strengthen strategic planning and financing for sustainability.
- 2. Develop a strategy to expand and strengthen existing partnerships**, especially with the private sector and through South-South and Triangular Cooperation. Consult national stakeholders to identify opportunities for private sector participation and regional learning.
- 3. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E):** Integrate output and outcome indicators to better reflect CCS achievements, develop an M&E dashboard for tracking CCS activities and strengthen M&E collaboration with national entities from the design stage.
- 4. Promote strengthened leadership and ownership of CCS activities.** Develop a communication and advocacy strategy to strengthen leadership engagement. Formalise institutional commitments and responsibilities for CCS activities. Assess the budget implications of new policies and frameworks to support resource mobilization.
- 5. WFP capacity:** Increase the use of WFP corporate resources, consider appointing a dedicated CCS advisor and incorporate relevant tools and resources into programme planning.
- 6. Capacity strengthening:** Further strengthen national stakeholder capacity to fully adopt and implement the three-pronged (3PA) approach for resilience. Empower communities to implement community-based participatory plans (CBPP) and provide technical assistance for new livelihood assets.
- 7. Integrate strategies to mitigate staff turnover**, such as handover and knowledge management. Advocate and support the curriculum integration of skills needed for sustaining national systems supported by CCS activities. Place more emphasis on the organizational and enabling environment spheres of CCS and less on the individual level.
- 8. Disability Inclusion:** Explicitly address the needs of persons with disabilities in the next CSP and collaborate with specialized agencies to address those needs.



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