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SUMMARY REPORT ON WFP FOLLOW-UP TO EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the preparation of WFP's evaluation policy, presented to the Board in October 2003, and discussions in WFP concerning the importance of learning, the Office of Evaluation felt the need to address the question of the usefulness of its evaluation recommendations and the follow-up action undertaken in response to them. Consultants were commissioned to study the follow-up actions taken and to make recommendations to improve the effectiveness of evaluation in the broader sense.

WFP's 2003 evaluation policy is based on the twin pillars of accountability and learning. However, in the period 2000–2002 covered by this study, the majority of evaluations managed by the Office of Evaluation consisted of project evaluations, with the recommendations being mainly addressed to managers in the field. This study therefore focuses on the learning pillar. It is to be noted that with the introduction of WFP's new evaluation policy, many project evaluations will be decentralized. The Office of Evaluation will focus on thematic evaluations and on evaluations of large projects and programmes. Its recommendations will include not only practical recommendations addressed to field managers but, increasingly, recommendations requiring corporate attention and accountability.

In this context, the most prominent conclusion of the study is that WFP can be satisfied that the Office of Evaluation contributed to the WFP knowledge base through generating acceptable recommendations for project and policy improvement: 95 percent of the sample of recommendations had been accepted and 88 percent were implemented or being implemented by mid-2004.

The study provides a number of recommendations that are specific to evaluation recommendations. A summary of these findings and recommendations is presented in Section III. In addition, it provides insights and suggestions for improving the evaluation process as a whole, which are presented in Section IV.

DRAFT DECISION*

The Board notes the information on evaluation recommendation follow-up contained in "Summary Report on WFP Follow-up to Evaluation Recommendations" (WFP/EB.A/2005/7-B) and OEDE's commitment to implementing the recommendations.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the Decisions and Recommendations document issued at the end of the session.



I. INTRODUCTION

1. This document provides a summary of a study conducted by WFP's Office of Evaluation (OEDE) to assess the contribution to WFP's knowledge base from the recommendations made by evaluations of WFP projects and policies. The study was designed with the following objectives:
 - to determine the extent of recommendation follow-up (RFU) action undertaken in response to OEDE evaluation recommendations;
 - to identify what factors influence the extent of RFU;
 - to assess the effectiveness of OEDE evaluation recommendations in producing improvements in evaluated projects, operations, policy and operational support; and
 - to identify any changes that would increase the ability of OEDE recommendations to maximize improvements to projects, operations, policy and operational support.
2. Evaluations of individual projects, programmes, operations and policies are conducted to promote learning from experience and to provide accountability information to stakeholders. Until September 2003, when the Executive Board approved a new evaluation policy (WFP/EB.3/2003/4-C), evaluations were managed primarily by OEDE and undertaken by consultants. Under the new policy, OEDE-managed evaluations are focused on learning at the organizational level and accountability; the majority of individual project evaluations are undertaken by country offices and regional bureaux.

II. STUDY METHOD

3. Learning from evaluations is deemed to have taken place when the recommendations of the evaluations are accepted and implemented by the management unit responsible. Learning would also be evident in the documents of a project superseding an evaluated project.
4. Learning and the implementation of a recommendation may be influenced by a number of characteristics of the recommendation itself. These include: (i) whether implementation is fully within the manager's control or involves other actors; (ii) the trust and credibility that exists between the project staff and the evaluators; and (iii) the perceived purposes of the evaluation.
5. To assess the extent to which evaluations have contributed to learning, this study examined a sample of 394 recommendations contained in 26 evaluations and enquired as to their implementation status. All 26 evaluations had been presented to the Board between 2000 and 2002. Thus, they represented evaluations under the pre-2003 evaluation policy, contained recommendations in an implementation matrix, which was introduced in January 2000, and had enjoyed sufficient lead time for implementation and effects to be apparent.
6. The sample recommendations were categorized according to characteristics that may have influenced the managers' ability to follow them up. Where another project succeeded the evaluated one, the documents of the successor project were examined to determine whether the recommendations had influenced the design of the latter.



7. The management units designated to implement the evaluation recommendations were surveyed in mid-2004. The survey addressed among other things the current status of each recommendation and the recommendation's usefulness. Twelve of the management units were interviewed by telephone to verify the information provided in the survey.
8. Field visits were made to seven of the management units. These comprised six country offices and one regional bureau. During the field visits, views on how evaluations could be made more useful to managers were sought from project beneficiaries, WFP staff, government partners, other United Nations agency staff and implementing partner representatives, 135 informants in all.
9. The data from the desk study and questionnaire survey were subjected to a statistical procedure that enabled identification of links between variables, successful implementation and therefore learning. These links suggest possible cause-and-effect relationships between the variables and the level of implementation and performance. The data from telephone and field interviews were not conducive to statistical analysis. Instead, they were collated into viewpoints judged by the consultant to be representative of the major position of interviewees.

DISTRIBUTION OF 394 EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS	
WFP location	% of recommendations
To country offices	80
To regional bureaux	4
To Headquarters units	16
Programme category	% of recommendations
Country programme	44
Emergency operations	11
Development projects/portfolios	8
Protracted relief and recovery operations	26
Policies (thematic evaluations)	10
Subject	% of recommendations
Activity level (programme activities, their execution, commodity management or logistics)	14
Operational level (coordination with other bodies, and programme-level issues)	66
Strategic level (policy, corporate interests, programme design)	20
Level of complexity	% of recommendations
Low	34
Medium	46
High	20



III. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The sample of 26 evaluations is representative of OEDE-managed evaluations during the period 2000–2002. For evaluations undertaken at this time, WFP can be satisfied that OEDE contributed to the WFP knowledge base through generating acceptable, practical recommendations for project and policy improvement: 95 percent of the recommendations were accepted by the management units concerned, of which 88 percent committed to take action to implement the recommendations. Management units reported having already taken action to implement 50 percent of the recommendations by the time the evaluations were presented to the Board.
11. Management units also reported that they had found the evaluations useful in preparing successor projects (6/20) and as a negotiating tool with governments (4/20) as well as in a number of other management functions. All but three of the recommendations were judged to be clear to the reader.

EXTENT TO WHICH THE ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS WERE REFLECTED IN SUCCESSOR PROJECT DOCUMENTS	
Extent included	% of recommendations
Included	65
Not included	30
Successor document not found	3

12. Although 65 percent of recommendations were found to be incorporated in successor project documents, it is probably true to say that any successor project or policy document should acknowledge the recommendations even if they are adjudged inappropriate.

Recommendations

- OEDE should ensure that all relevant evaluation recommendations are addressed through its participation in the Project Review Committee.
- It would be helpful if country directors' handover notes included reference to any evaluation and the status of its recommendations.
- The Operations Department (OD), regional bureaux or OEDE should institute a systematic method for regular follow-up on implementation of recommendations to help to ensure that managers make this a priority despite staff changes and competing priorities.
- WFP staff supervisors should ensure that implementation of evaluation recommendations is included in unit work plans and performance and competency enhancement (PACE) documents for all staff concerned.
- It would be helpful to managers if they had access to a searchable and concise database of implementation issues and the recommended means of addressing them. A revision of the current Evaluation Memory System, which is being linked to the *PASSit on* initiative, may achieve this.



EXTENT TO WHICH THE RECOMMENDED ACTION WAS TAKEN	
Status of action taken	% of recommendations
Fully implemented	54
Implementation in progress	34
Delayed, stopped or rejected	12

13. Telephone and field interviews showed that for some recommendations whose implementation was recorded as in progress, implementation had started when the management unit responsible had been reminded of the recommendation by the study questionnaire. Other recommendations had been implemented because they were required by other WFP initiatives or because staff who believed the action to be necessary had coincidentally initiated it without being aware of the recommendation. Yet others may have been left in abeyance until revitalized by enquiries as to their status.

Recommendation

14. OEDE and OD should create a mechanism for regular reporting of the status of evaluation recommendation implementation.

INFLUENCE OF THE EVALUATION RECOMMENDATION ON THE ACTION, AND EFFECT OF THE ACTION OF PROJECT PERFORMANCE	
Extent of influence	% of recommendations
Influential	47
Significant	45
No role	7
Effect on project performance	
Improved performance	63
Uncertain as to effect	25
No effect	12

15. The results of the survey indicate that OEDE-managed evaluations have a high level of influence on performance. However, telephone and field interviews showed that management units were almost always assessing performance intuitively, without monitoring or other verifiable evidence. Therefore, the apparent high level of effect on performance must be treated cautiously.
16. Currently, there is almost no means by which the effect of particular policies can be assessed without mounting a special study.



Recommendations

- A systematic follow-up procedure may increase the number of recommendations implemented, and the speed with which they are implemented, with a corresponding improvement in WFP knowledge and project and policy performance.
- It is to be hoped that as results-based management (RBM) becomes more widespread in WFP, objectively verifiable data on performance will be available for performance review and to establish the degree of influence of recommended changes.
- Evaluation recommendations seek the broadest possible support from all the stakeholders concerned, at the same time ensuring that difficult issues are not ignored because of lack of stakeholder consensus on how the issues should be addressed.
- One WFP staff interviewee in this study suggested that evaluation recommendations should be presented in the form of a logical framework with indicators that would enable the influence of the recommended actions on performance to be measured.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROBABILITY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS	
Factor for delayed implementation of 29 recommendations	% of recommendations
Recommendation no longer appropriate	17
Not funded	38
No commitment from partners	31
Not accepted by beneficiaries	3
Political/technical problems	10

17. The statistical analysis of the desk study and questionnaire variables did not reveal any variable that may cause a recommendation to have a greater probability of being implemented and a positive effect on performance achieved.
18. Three influencing factors were identified by stakeholders interviewed during telephone and field interviews and the survey conducted during the study. Although they alert OEDE to the range of perceptions amongst the stakeholders, they cannot be regarded as representative of all stakeholders or any one stakeholder group. The interviewees largely viewed evaluation as a tool for project-specific improvement, a view that was perhaps appropriate for evaluations carried out before September 2003. Under the current evaluation policy, OEDE evaluations will be more concerned with organizational-level learning, so these perceptions relate more to the future individual project evaluations of country offices and regional bureaux. The following three factors were identified using the survey:
- **Country office/regional bureau/Headquarters unit.** A recommendation made to a country office is more likely to be implemented and to have a positive effect on performance than one made to a regional bureau or a Headquarters unit.
 - **Activity-level/operational/strategic.** Subject matter – activity, operations or strategic – is likely to be influential, because activity-level recommendations usually require the agreement and action of fewer actors than operational and strategic recommendations.



- **Multi-partner/WFP only.** The complexity of the recommendation, in terms of involving action by WFP only, including action by United Nations agencies and partners, and including government action, is only mildly influential in implementation in the analysis of questionnaire data but strongly influential in the interview data. WFP staff appear to find recommendations requiring the agreement, action and sometimes funding by partners and changes of policy and inputs by governments to be more difficult to implement than those within its own control and resources.

19. In addition to these factors identified through the survey, the telephone and field interviews produced a number of variables as influential in recommendation implementation. They are presented in the box below.

TELEPHONE AND FIELD VISIT SURVEY

“A recommendation is more likely to be implemented if it...”

- is proposed by the management unit or partner responsible and included in the summary evaluation report and matrix;
- is to be effected in a successor project rather than in the current project, particularly if changes in location or strategy are required;
- requires only action by WFP – partner agreement/action/funding is not required – and deals with matters within WFP’s control;
- can be implemented before there are significant staff changes in the unit responsible;
- does not require resources beyond those budgeted for the relevant financial category;
- allows for the cultural, personal and time constraints of current and future actors within the organizations concerned;
- is supported by other WFP requirements/initiatives/priorities such as RBM data collection;
- is agreed with and understood by partners and donors’ local representatives during the evaluation;
- is clear to current and future WFP staff in terms of what is required and why through brief, easy-to-read reports;
- does not require action by Headquarters units;
- accords with the beneficiaries’ needs and priorities;
- provides a practical course of action for the unit responsible, not advice to “consider” or “investigate”;
- is clearly within WFP’s mandate;
- has benefits that are tangible, quickly realized and perceived as significant by WFP staff;
- does not imply criticism of WFP staff but appears to build upon or enhance sound work;
- is feasible in the context which may be continuously changing; for example, a recommendation may be feasible during a time of low insecurity but not during high insecurity;
- is consistent with the priorities of governments and partners and perceived to be likely to maintain or increase contributions;
- is indicated as a priority action for project enhancement and/or is currently being introduced;
- is followed up in such a way that implementation remains a priority for the unit responsible.



20. Consideration of these factors by OEDE and future evaluation teams may increase the likelihood of recommendations being implemented and implemented more quickly, but they may also discourage evaluations from addressing difficult issues that are central to making projects relevant and effective. Perhaps these variables need to be borne in mind but not thought of as requirements for useful evaluation recommendations.

Recommendations

- The number of recommendations made by an evaluation should be kept to a minimum, and should be classified or prioritized, for example as “critical” or “important”.
- Implementation of recommendations may be adjusted in situations when there is a compelling justification that changed circumstances require modification of the original recommendation.

IV. INSIGHTS INTO IMPROVING EVALUATION AS A WHOLE

21. The information gathered in the telephone and field interviews was largely provided by WFP staff in managerial and supervisory roles. The interviews produced a large number of observations about evaluations and suggestions for improving them. At the same time, the interviewees do not represent all stakeholders with an interest in the evaluations and their interests may sometimes be at the expense of those of other stakeholders. However, they do provide some insights and guidance as to the perceptions, concerns and needs of stakeholders for evaluations that more fully address the needs of managers for operational learning.
22. As WFP’s 2003 evaluation policy focuses OEDE evaluations on organizational learning and accountability, the insights and suggestions presented in the following pages may be more applicable to self-evaluations and evaluations conducted by country offices and regional bureaux than to future OEDE-managed evaluations.

Learning

23. Evaluations whose emphasis is on learning should be conducted primarily to promote learning that facilitates the preparation of successor projects to those being evaluated, improvement in project performance and policy formulation. The learning should be largely at the level of project implementers and policy developers. Learning by Headquarters units on operational matters should be included when changes are required to guidelines, regulations, processes and procedures that directly affect project implementation.

Self-Evaluations and Management Reviews

24. Self-evaluations and management reviews are not adequate alternatives to independent evaluations, but their learning potential is high; they should therefore be conducted regularly.

Terms of Reference

25. It is worthwhile for the terms of reference (TORs) to have a common structure and be as focused as possible. It should be the evaluation manager’s responsibility to ensure that senior management and Board issues are incorporated in TORs, and the role of the management unit responsible to ensure that the issues of concern to in-country



stakeholders are included through thorough consultation. A preliminary field visit by the evaluation manager would be useful to establish agreement on TORs with stakeholders.

26. TORs should limit evaluations to the main issues rather than attempt to cover all aspects of a project. Comprehensive coverage requires an evaluation team of an unmanageable size and a field mission of excessive length.
27. It is good practice for TORs to include the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

Evaluation Teams

28. It is important for evaluation teams to be gender-balanced and comprised of evaluators who together have the full range of required skills, including:
 - knowledge of local culture and country context;
 - ability to communicate in the language(s) of the country;
 - rapid rural appraisal skills;
 - no preconceived ideas or strong biases;
 - relevant technical knowledge and experience in its application;
 - thorough understanding of WFP's mandate and relevant current policies, guidelines, procedures and systems;
 - wide experience of food aid projects, including WFP's ability to present complex information interestingly and clearly to a diverse audience;
 - ability to write clearly and concisely to tight deadlines;
 - ability to establish good working relationships quickly;
 - strong evaluation skills and experience; and
 - leadership and organizational ability
29. The OEDE evaluation manager could be a member of the evaluation team if he or she contributes some of the required characteristics.

Methods of Work

30. The necessary data should be requested and made available from the field offices ahead of the field mission; the team should be familiar with the project before entering the country so that staff and partners do not have to brief the team from basics and can concentrate on discussions rather than on searching for data.
31. It is good practice for teams to hold a briefing for all stakeholders at the start of the field mission so that everyone is fully briefed on the purpose, methods of work and itinerary. Throughout the field mission, the team should frequently discuss its tentative findings and recommendations with stakeholder representatives to increase factual accuracy and feasibility.
32. It would be valuable for teams to spend more time with beneficiaries, using appropriate techniques to elicit information. It would also be valuable for teams to meet people in authority in government and not merely counterpart staff, because implementation is as much dependent on higher-level commitment and understanding as on that at the technical level.



33. Final in-country debriefings should include all stakeholders. The WFP manager should have a separate meeting before the debriefing in order to prepare his or her response.

Reports

34. The recommendation matrix needs to contain all the recommendations of the team. Consideration might be given to providing additional information such as the implementation timeframe, the cost of implementation, the in-country actors responsible and expected benefits.
35. It would be helpful for reports to have a common structure and to be provided in languages that make it available to as many stakeholders as possible.
36. A comprehensive draft report should be in the hands of the management unit responsible within two weeks of the completion of the field mission. It may be appropriate to have the team remain in-country for some days after the final debriefing to accelerate this process. Finalization of the report, however, should allow time for ample consultation with stakeholders.

V. CONCLUSION

37. OEDE should update the evaluation guidelines and introduce the recommendations contained in the summary report into evaluation practice.



ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EMS	Evaluation Memory System
OD	Operations Department
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEDE	Office of Evaluation
PACE	performance and competency enhancement
RBM	results-based management
RFU	recommendation follow-up
TOR	terms of reference

