2011
WFP OFFICE OF EVALUATION
Evaluation Brief
WFP
wfp.org

Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets

Context

Interest in social protection and safety nets is growing; such systems now exist in countries in every region of the world. Safety nets can save lives when shocks and emergencies strike. Social protection aims at broader social and economic development by reducing poverty and inequality. International policies increasingly emphasize governments' role in managing their own development assistance. Many governments have put in place safety net or social protection systems, which have become central features of how international development organizations seek to address poverty and vulnerability in developing countries.

Safety nets are not new to WFP. The 2004 policy on Food-based Safety Nets presented principles and roles for WFP, based on country contexts. The 2008-2013 WFP Strategic Plan mentions safety nets as a means of strengthening resilience to shocks, and proposes that "WFP will develop nutrition, school feeding and other safety net programmes". Recent WFP policy papers that incorporate safety net or social protection include those on capacity development (2004), vouchers and cash (2008), school feeding (2009) and HIV/AIDS (2010).

Social Protection and Safety Nets

The evaluation used the following working definitions, developed from earlier work by WFP's policy and programme units:

i) **Social protection** refers to food or cash transfers to the most vulnerable to protect against livelihood risks, promote livelihood opportunities, and enhance the social status and rights of socially excluded and marginalized people.

ii) **Food-based safety nets** provide direct, regular and predictable food assistance, in cash or in kind, to the most vulnerable people, to prevent them from falling below a minimum level of food security as a result of a shock, to increase their resilience to shocks and – in some cases – to promote their food security.

WFP's traditional work aims primarily at providing protective safety nets, but it can also achieve "higher-level goals" such as preventing or mitigating shocks, promoting livelihoods or empowering the marginalized.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The objective of the evaluation was to increase understanding of how WFP can best contribute to social protection and safety nets, and the factors that affect WFP's ability to do so. It aims to help institutionalize new approaches and inform programming choices.

Evaluation methods included field visits to five country offices and two regional bureaux, remote assessment of two country offices, benchmarking against good practice, document review, and interviews with WFP staff and external stakeholders. Country visits examined WFP's roles in different contexts, based on whether the national social protection system was:

- transitioning towards a national safety net: Senegal and Sierra Leone;
- establishing a national safety net: Ethiopia and Uganda;
- improving an established national safety net: Colombia, Georgia and Guatemala.

The evaluation was presented to the WFP Executive Board in June 2011.

Key Findings

Relevance and Results Any of WFP instruments and modalities can, in principle, provide social protection and safety net benefits, but the extent to which they actually do depends on how the activity is designed and carried out.

Most of the WFP projects and activities reviewed aim primarily to protect people in periods of stress and shock. Some of WFP's work aims to reduce the likelihood of a shock occurring, or move people out of chronic poverty. WFP's interventions have greater potential to achieve these goals when traditional mechanisms are combined with new approaches, such as school feeding programmes based on local agricultural production or linked to take-home meals that contribute to household livelihoods; establishment of rice banks or grain reserves that build resources for protecting against future shocks; and FFW/CFW projects that construct disaster-resilient infrastructure. Such efforts should also be well linked to government priorities and be of sufficient duration.

Adherence to Good Practice Social protection and safety net good practice includes adequacy, timeliness, predictability and sustainability. In some WFP programmes, beneficiary needs were adequately met but only for the duration of a short-lived programme. Short-term assistance may not offer sufficient protection, because beneficiaries have insufficient time to build adequate assets that enable them to avoid adopting negative coping mechanisms when assistance ends. In others, the transfer was not adequate to meet needs, or coverage was inadequate. Some modalities, such as school feeding, are more likely to be timely because they are well established and do not face start-up delays. However, even in well-established programmes, pipeline breaks negatively affect predictability.

Constraints on levels of funding and duration negatively affect predictability. Several modalities made good overall progress towards sustainability and hand-over, having been incorporated into government strategies and implemented by government even if in some cases these are still funded by external donors.

Appropriate targeting is also critically important, and WFP attempts to target the poorest and most vulnerable. Possible exclusion errors can be addressed when WFP identifies partners and complementary interventions to serve those in need that are not covered by WFP programmes. In several cases analyzed in the evaluation, WFP advocated with government to provide coverage for people not included in WFP programmes, to ensure that none of those in need were excluded.

Integration & Impact Potential WFP's integration into national social protection and safety nets systems and its impact potential depend on the country context and WFP's capacity to play both operational and non-operational roles. Operational roles include implementation, filling gaps and demonstrating programmes. Non-operational roles include advising, advocacy, designing policies and systems, monitoring and evaluation, and capacity development.

In countries without national social protection systems or safety net programmes, WFP's work was well integrated but somewhat limited in scale. WFP programmes complement rather than duplicate the efforts of national actors and partners. Hand-over

is intended, but distant. In these countries, school feeding has high potential for generating impact, because it is the longest-established activity and has sought integration and included government capacity building. The impact potential of other activities is limited to temporary protection due to modest scale, shorter duration and limited capacity development.

In countries that are establishing social protection or safety net programmes, political will and government capacity are much greater, so WFP programmes are significantly larger and closely linked to the efforts of the government and other partners. In some cases, the credibility and access WFP gained through its capacity to deliver, positions WFP well to support development of national policies and strategies. A wider range of WFP instruments have potential for generating impact, because of larger scale and focus on government capacity development. In one country, WFP is involved in a long-standing consortium-based implementation arrangement for the national food safety net, which multiplies WFP's impact potential and helps ensure continued funding.

In countries that have relatively well-established social protection systems, WFP shifted to a non-operational role, providing advice on policy and programme design, implementation and improvement, at the government's request. Impact potential varies, depending on WFP's capacity to transition to a less operational role and influence government policies and practices. By continuing to provide technical advisory, monitoring and other services after the hand-over of programmes such as school feeding, WFP is helping to ensure sustainability and the achievement of long-term outcomes.

External Factors Affecting Performance Although on the increase, funding for social protection is often directed to coordinated programmes supported by social protection platforms. WFP's strength is its operational capability to deliver at scale and in complex environments, which positions WFP to fill gaps. Donor support for WFP's work in social protection appears to depend on the country context, particularly food access and food security needs; perceptions of WFP's mandate; WFP's knowledge of social protection concepts and ability to use a range of modalities appropriate to different situations; partnerships with government and others; and predictability and sustainability of WFP assistance, which are hampered by the lack of unrestricted and multi-year funding.

Some country partners look to WFP for leadership in providing food-based safety nets. WFP is often seen as a leader in food security, nutrition, vulnerability analysis and preparedness systems and capacity development assistance is sought from WFP. To maximize its contributions, WFP should be clearer in communicating its role, more active in policy discussions at national and global levels and better at coordinating with others.

Social, political and economic factors shape WFP's potential to contribute to national systems. WFP has the most potential for making operational contributions in countries with significant social, political and economic challenges. WFP's operational role diminishes as countries develop and government and national actors assume responsibility for implementation. WFP's non-operational contributions are greatest when the political will exists to create a sustainable social protection system and the systems and capacities are being refined.

Reference:
Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at www.wfp.org/evaluation

For more information please contact the Office of Evaluation WFP.evaluation@WFP.org

Organizational Factors Affecting Performance
Some WFP policies integrate a social protection or safety net approach, but many staff have a limited understanding of how policies can be translated into practice. The recent decision to add a non-tonnage based component to the financial framework will better accommodate non-operational roles. The country strategy process provides for an overall assessment of the national context and needs, which will help align programmes with national systems. WFP monitoring and reporting generally focus on outputs rather than outcomes, and do not capture non-operational roles and activities. There is a high demand for better knowledge management, but staff have few opportunities to learn about good practices and lessons from other countries. Resource mobilization is constrained by a lack of clarity about WFP's roles. Diversification of funding sources and an increase in un-earmarked funds is also needed.

Positive aspects of WFP's organizational "culture" that can be carried over from traditional to social protection/safety nets programming include a "can-do" attitude, delivering with speed and at scale, problem-solving, innovation, and a decentralized structure with strong country office leaders. Less positive characteristics include impatience with policy engagement; focus on outputs and standard instruments, and lack of experience working in urban areas.

WFP staff demonstrate great willingness to learn on the job, and show initiative in seeking new knowledge related to social protection and safety nets but need to increase their understanding of social protection concepts and skills in policy analysis, advocacy, long-term coordination, targeting for new modalities and urban areas, monitoring and evaluation, government capacity development and analysis of public expenditure.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The evaluation found that WFP is contributing to safety nets and social protection, especially in activities such as school feeding. However, institutionalizing a safety net and social protection approach more broadly within WFP will require changes in programme objectives, operations and collaboration. Simply re-labelling projects and programmes as safety nets or social protection will have a negative effect on WFP's credibility. Some WFP programmes are being integrated into national systems, and WFP is moving towards generally agreed standards of good practice. An emphasis on good practice is needed to ensure credibility and impact.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. Focus WFP social protection and safety net efforts on its comparative advantages.
Recommendation 2. Develop WFP organizational capacities for social protection and safety nets.
Recommendation 3. Develop WFP staff capacities for social protection and safety nets.
Recommendation 4. Position WFP social protection and safety net efforts in the external environment.
Recommendation 5. Contribute to the development of national social protection systems.
Recommendation 6. Continuously improve adherence to social protection good practice standards.