

Evaluation Brief



Evaluation of how Country Offices adapt to change

Context

This evaluation is one of four strategic evaluations conducted in 2010 and related to the WFP's strategic shift from food aid to food assistance. As the global context, food security and policies and practice of major actors evolve, so should the WFP responses. This will allow the organisation to stay relevant and effective in addressing current and future hunger challenges. Country Offices (COs) are at the front line of translating organizational goals into action and are constantly called upon to redefine their roles and adapt their strategies, programmes and partnership to changes in the external environment and in the internal environment. Understanding how COs adapt to change is pivotal in understanding how WFP is endowing itself to fulfil its mandate in a constantly changing world in which nearly a billion people are recognized as hungry. The expectation is that the right changes at the right time will enhance the relevance of WFP's contribution and lead to more effective efforts to meet hunger needs.

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The objectives of this evaluation were three-fold: i) to determine how COs have adapted to changing needs in the external and internal environment in the past five years; ii) to assess the processes employed by COs to achieve desired changes; iii) to determine the wider factors (both internal and external) which have facilitated or hindered the ability of COs to change, including elements of organisational change process related to the introduction of new organisational priorities and tools.

Methodology: the principal data collection methods were documents review and semi-structured interviews of 156 stakeholders, including WFP staff, government partners, donor agencies, other UN agencies, NGOs and other partners in 5 countries (Burundi, Cambodia, Indonesia, Tanzania and Uganda) and at WFP Regional Bureaux and Headquarters. The primary criterion for the selection of COs was the reported extent of adaptations to programme since the approval of the Strategic Framework 2008-2013. For the purposes of this evaluation, only COs not engaged in major emergency operations were selected. Diversity in programme size and regional representation were also considered, along with the availability of the CO to participate in the evaluation.

The evaluation adopted a recognized conceptual framework, which analysed three core factors that influence the degree of success of organizational change: acceptance, ability and authority. These three sets of factors make up the 'change space'. According to this model, successful change happens when there is sufficient "change space" created by these three dynamic factors with 'leadership' playing a key role.

The evaluation report was presented to the Executive Board in February 2012.

Key Findings and Conclusions

Change at Country Office level

Over the past 5 years, all COs visited by the evaluation have been involved in significant adaptation of programmes and operations. The 2008-2013 Strategic Plan endorses a substantive repositioning of WFP beyond 'food aid', and has offered the opportunity to initiate programmes without a link to food aid and to expand the array of programme tools available. Among the main changes observed at CO level, there are: i) changes in sector of engagement in such diverse fields such as agriculture, nutrition, social protection, education, health, poverty reduction, livelihoods, disaster risk reduction and preparedness, among others; ii) changes in programme planning processes; iii) changes in partnerships and positioning; iv) changes in sources of funding; v) changes in staffing. Generally, action is being guided by the following principles underlying WFP's Strategic Plan: i) activities should enhance national capacities; ii) government ownership is central; iii) the approach should be truly participatory; and iv) activities should be aligned with government priorities, UN prioritization and harmonization, and WFP's strategic plan. However, there is the perception is that the new programming choices are expanding without sufficient strategic focus or clear boundaries.

The typical process of change by COs included reviews of activities considered unsustainable, concentration on programme efforts, building on specific components of existing programmes for which strong support exists, and identification of new gaps and opportunities with little restriction of topic or field as long as addressing hunger in some way. In doing so, COs have taken a practical approach to making adaptations, while striving to introduce new programme planning processes and projects. However, while this enhances opportunities for WFP to contribute to national efforts to meet hunger and food needs, it also carries the risk of WFP programs being scattered and difficult to support. The evaluation also noted that change at the CO level has often happened under crisis-like conditions, with insufficient time for transition and action being taken only when the money ran out, when forced otherwise to change.

Drivers of change

WFP COs have embarked on substantive efforts to transform programme and strategies mostly as a result of local external stimuli. The Strategic Plan 2008-13 was not found to be a 'driver of change' but it constructively served as the authorizing instrument for

change. The external factors mirrored in part global trends. Amongst the key external factors, are: i) changes in context; ii) national directiveness (“ownership”); iii) growing national financial resources and support of development concerns; iv) stronger national policy frameworks; v) shifting approaches to addressing food and hunger concerns; vi) funding shift in support of national execution; vii) interagency coordination. Key internal drivers of change included office leadership, funding reductions (often severe), and the commitment of staff to relevance and effective action.

Factors facilitating or limiting the change

With regard to Acceptance, the need and unavoidability of change by WFP COs was widely acknowledged by stakeholders, but feedback suggests that “acceptance” of the shift by WFP is weak overall, both internally and externally. Internally, the evaluation found that COs have tended to resist adaptation beyond transactional improvements, unless forced to change; changes have tended to be more reactive than proactive; the choice to adapt has tended to be practical and making use of opportunities. HQ is perceived as advocating for the change but not showing real commitment to support it. Externally, while WFP’s changes in programme and strategy were applauded, weak “acceptance” by partners was reflected in questions about role and mandate, uncertainties about capacity gaps, and a lack of clarity on what the changes really implied.

Authority is important in the change process, as agents engaged in change must have the formal and informal authority to find and implement new ideas. Actions have been taken by COs that enhance authority space for change. However, in terms of authority frameworks, there are some limiting factors which are related to the ambiguity and absence of clarity on the implications for WFP’s mandate, as well as to the need to address potential tensions concerning inter-agency role and coordination.

As far as Abilities are concerned, current COs abilities to achieve the new programme changes are widely regarded as weak. Many of the limiting factors have arisen from systemic issues. The organizational, technical and political support of the change efforts provided to COs by HQ and RB was consistently reported as weak and uneven. Financial constraints remain one of the most dominant limitations threatening the change efforts; a funding mechanism for stable support of non-food programming does not yet exist.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The programme changes being made by country offices reviewed in this evaluation reflect strategic change for the organization, not mere adoption of new tools or incremental programme adjustments. The changes being taken impact and potentially require adaptation by the organization in all aspects - focus, services, basis of engagement with government, partnerships with UN agencies and others, staffing, working modalities, funding. In every CO included in the evaluation, experienced and dedicated staff were found to be actively working to make the changes a success. However, without diminishing the many achievements to date, the evaluation found the foundational elements of this change to be weak - weak “change space”, meaning weak “agreement”, “authority”, and

“abilities”.

In institutionalizing and operationalizing the new programme approach, the change process is still at an early, formative stage.

The Strategic Plan 2008-2013 endorses the use of new tools but offers little guidance beyond that. Full transition would require considerably more concerted action, more stable programme funding and a dedicated organizational strategy with a long term perspective.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Clarify the basis on which WFP change efforts are to be considered and implemented - including clarifications of core commitments, programme priorities, authority frameworks, and interpretation of how activities in the new environment are linked to WFP’s mandate.

Clarification of the basis for change is critical to ensuring that adaptations support organizational objectives and enhance legitimacy and “agreement”, “authority” and “abilities”. Clarify the fundamental needs and problems to which WFP is committed, and the compelling goals to which WFP efforts are dedicated. Clarify the “core” programme activities that WFP will commit to and build competencies for. Addressing ambiguities that stakeholders may have in the interpretation of WFP’s mandate in the new environment, for the mandate may be centrally but is not with partners in the field.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen internal change management processes.

Clarify a corporate approach to managing change. This should include actions to: improve visioning capabilities; clarify organizational aims and commitments; further develop dynamic analysis of hunger issues as evidence for the need to change; strengthen assertive problem-solving mechanisms; improve the synergies between Cos, RB and HQ in support of change management. Specific attention should be given to strengthening leadership approaches and structural changes that will enhance results-based goal achievement.

Recommendation 3: Enhance efforts to mobilize support and build consensus for change.

Undertake a review of ways to strengthen structures and functions of the full organization efforts supporting change. The effort should aim to enhance “agreement” with all stakeholders, ensure that sufficient authority frameworks are in place and that concerted attention is given to addressing the new abilities challenges. Building agreement for change will be more effective if organizational support is mounted.

Recommendation 4: Address the gap in the financial base for non-emergency activities.

Mobilize an exceptional effort, with the Executive Board, donors and other governments, to establish mechanisms for more stable funding for non-emergency hunger related activities and transition periods.

Recommendation 5: Mount a special initiative to address critical challenges and limitations impacting the current change initiative.

- a) Enhance current efforts to address staff capacity limitations.
- b) Review and enhance the structure and systems to guide and support change efforts of Cos; this relates to HQ functions, and under-resourced regional bureaus.
- c) Mount a time limited process to forge new partnership arrangements with key partners relevant to the non-emergency context. In particular, the effort should seek to establish positive partnership arrangements with UNICEF and FAO, the two partners for which collaborations is likely to enhance effectiveness and avoid conflicts over roles.

Reference:



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

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