

# Evaluation Brief



## Synthesis of WFP Operation Evaluations (July 2014 – June 2015)

### Context

In alignment with WFP's corporate emphasis on evidence and accountability for results and its ongoing organizational strengthening in the shift from food aid to food assistance, the Office of Evaluation (OEV) launched, in 2013, a new series of single Operation Evaluations (OpEv). Intended to complement OEV's more complex evaluations of policies, strategies, country portfolios and impacts of core activities, the series was designed to efficiently deliver an acceptable coverage level of WFP's operations by independent, credible and useful evaluations, to enhance internal and external accountability and learning.

### Subject of Synthesis

The operations evaluations series is synthesised annually. This is the second such synthesis report, covering 16 evaluations conducted between July 2014 and June 2015, using a common process and framework, and three key questions:

- i) How appropriate is the operation?
- ii) What are the results of the operation?
- iii) Why and how has the operation produced the observed results?

### Objectives and Scope of the Evaluations

The operations reviewed were implemented in diverse and sometimes volatile settings, from refugee camps to development contexts between 2010 and 2016. They had a combined planned value of USD 2.8 billion and a total combined funding of USD 1.5 billion, targeted 26 million beneficiaries a year, and were of varying types, durations and sizes. The coverage of the OpEv evaluations by region so far conducted within the two years of the series broadly reflected that of WFP operations.

### Key Findings

#### Operation Designs

**Coverage and Scale:** The 16 operations were ambitious in terms of coverage and scale, seeking near full-coverage of when target groups were refugees or internally-displaced. **Rigour of design:** Three-quarters of operations had a comprehensive analytical basis for their designs, helping determine alignment and complementarity. Close to a third were designed under a framework of country strategies (albeit operations design informed by strategies only in two instances). Weaknesses related to broad and shallow analysis with insufficient focus on specific target populations, with only a quarter of operations assessed as having gender-sensitive designs. **Appropriateness to needs:** All of the 16 operations were broadly appropriate to beneficiary needs, with limitations ranging from weak activity design (a quarter), recommended greater clarity of intent or reorientation (a quarter), or failure to address specific needs (a fifth). **Geographical targeting:** whilst

appropriate at the time of design, did not always remain so over time with needs evolving during implementation. The need to revisit geographical targeting in light of current population needs was raised in 10 evaluations. **Transfer modalities:** assessed as appropriate in half, with a quarter of evaluations recommending a reassessment of modality choices.

#### Coherence and Strategic Positioning

WFP's strategic positioning varied across operations, but continued the trajectory signalled in the 2014–2017 Strategic Plan, from *implementing* to *enabling*. All were coherent with the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, and almost all operations sought coherence with national and sector policy frameworks and objectives. About half were in direct support to national programmes in education, health or social protection. In the nine countries where operating architectures permitted, evaluations found WFP moving into policy spaces, seeking to act as a strategic partner in harmonized responses for food security and nutrition. **Intended partnerships** were found strong, however good intentions were not always put in practice.

#### Results

The data availability has improved from last year's synthesis, and monitoring systems were praised in seven evaluation reports. Systematic weaknesses such as limited monitoring or analysis, poor quality of data, or parallel systems were identified in half, although corrective measures were noted.

**Output level -** Beneficiary numbers and quantities of food, cash and vouchers distributed are the main output-level results reported. Data on capacity development outputs remain limited. As for last year's synthesis, the evaluations indicate that the targeted beneficiaries were served with less food than planned (67% of target). The main causes are pipeline breaks or funding shortfalls, but external factors linked to operational terrain are also at play (strikes, insecurity). Ration unsuitability was less frequently reported than last year, and effects noted included significant drop-out from or longer recuperation time within nutrition programmes. **General distributions (GD):** Half of the operations evaluated, implemented GD activities, using a variety of modalities, and reaching a high proportion of planned beneficiaries. Targets of planned beneficiaries were overall reached in GD activities (between 4 – 4.4 million people in 2013 and 2014 respectively, corresponding to over 95% of targets). **School feeding:** school feeding reached the highest number of beneficiaries (some 4.5 million per year), with almost all operations including this activity. Comparatively high achievements against targets reflected proportionately high funding levels stemming from WFP established track record in this sector. **Nutrition:** nutrition activities reached between 2.3 and 3 million beneficiaries per year, through

10 operations. From 2013–2014, coverage of targeted beneficiaries rose from 79 to 87% (from 47% in 2012 for these operations), with performance comparatively constant across operations, possibly reflecting more realistic planning and/or growing confidence from donors. **FFA**: fewer beneficiaries were reached in terms of absolute numbers (480,000 to 700,000 per year) but targets achieved varied from 100% in 2013 to 58% in 2014. **Cash-based transfers** were used in half of the operations, with some USD 48 million disbursed in 2013–2014, corresponding to 35% percent of planned amounts, however with wide variations across operations. Such transfers were well received by beneficiaries.

**Outcome level** – More readily **available**, **data quality** remained a challenge for outcome data (inconsistent baselines, unrealistic targets, missing data, etc.). **Under-achievement** against targets related to the mid-term nature of the evaluations (half of the reports). Positive results were more frequent under SO 3 (reduce risk and enable people/communities/countries to meet food and nutrition needs), despite the lower numbers of FFA beneficiaries reached, reflecting namely WFP’s increasing emphasis on disaster risk reduction. Performance under SO1 (saving lives and protect livelihoods) and SO2 (support or restore food and nutrition security and rebuild livelihoods) appears encouraging. Under SO 4 (reduce undernutrition), WFP’s shift from *implementer* to *enabler* contributed to significant **policy-level achievements**. Capacity-development activities were highlighted in five evaluations as underperforming, often linked to flawed designs, with under-reporting (limited evidence reported) remaining a concern for capacity-development indicators. Some results remain **under-represented** (not captured by corporate systems), with evaluations uncovering significant contributions to Millennium Development Goals and Zero Hunger Challenge, such as strengthened economic activity, increased agricultural production, increased access to health services, or increased resilience through climate change measures.

All evaluations referenced **gender**, albeit with varying depth of analysis, with only four operations having gender-sensitive designs and seven focusing mainly on the quantitative notion of ‘including women’ in activities (and a quantitative approach to measuring progress). At implementation stage, six operations found positive **transformational changes**, such as building leadership capacity, or a greater role for women in the household decision making processes. Ten evaluations commented positively on WFP’s swift adaptation to context and unpredictable situations. **Partnerships** were strong with national and local authorities and new **enabling roles** of WFP were outlined in ten operations (as convenor, modeller, leveraging actor, information provider, knowledge broker, and pilot tester). Yet some opportunities were missed, with a lingering tendency towards a ‘go-at-it alone’ approach to interventions. WFP relationships with cooperating partners was weaker (seven operations), mostly linked to poor **communications**, or limited joint planning or risk sharing, which compromised credibility. Negative effects of poor communications on beneficiaries were reported in four operations. **Internal coherence** remains a problem and six of the multi-component operations presented ‘siloed’ activities in terms of design, targeting, and intended results. Only two operations were

assessed as **efficient** (timeliness and costs), and two considered **sustainable** of the fifteen operations expected to have sustainability objectives).

### Explanatory Factors

Factors explaining results are both external (operational terrain, non-optimal funding in terms of volumes or type/duration), and internal (limited human resources, inadequate targeting because of evolving needs or limited application or awareness of selection criteria, weak results chains, poor internal communication). Enabling factors include strong technical back-stopping by regional bureaux of small country offices and WFP credibility with government partners, arising from WFP’s technical and analytical capacities in sectors such as nutrition profiling and disaster-risk management.

### Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Overall, the findings of these evaluations suggest that WFP is progressing steadily, albeit sometimes uncertainly, along a continuum of change. WFP’s reorientation from *implementer* to *enabler*, signalled in the 2014–2017 Strategic Plan, appears to be gaining momentum. WFP has moved swiftly into policy spaces, acting as a convenor, modeller, information provider, leveraging actor, knowledge broker, and pilot tester of innovation to support nationally owned food assistance strategies. However, these changes have been accompanied by ‘growing pains’. The new skills and approaches required are not always matched by WFP’s technical and human capacities. A cultural tendency to “go it alone” sometimes undermined partnership; and operations lacked internal coherence. WFP has been vulnerable to limited and piecemeal funding, with short-term commitments and project-based resources restricting room to manoeuvre and scope for medium-term strategizing.

### Lessons learned

Seven lessons were identified to support WFP and pertain to: partnerships; capacity development; improved planning and design; confirming and conveying the evidence-base for decisions; greater gender-sensitivity (and strategic approach to gender equality); communications, and; flexible and predictable funding.

WFP’s transition from implementer to enabler implies a shift of operating model to achieve its strategic partnership potential. Engagement in joint planning, risk sharing, action and learning, as well as a capacity development model aimed at systemic change that uses collective analyses and approaches are all part of that transition. Ambitions should be underpinned by rigour, technical competence, appropriate resourcing and a strategic capacity-development model. Timeframes for change should be realistic and include hand-over strategies. And the need for flexible and predictable funding to better enable WFP’s operational agility to respond flexibly and strategically.



**Full and summary reports of the evaluations and the Management Responses are available at [www.wfp.org/evaluation](http://www.wfp.org/evaluation). For more information please contact the Office of Evaluation [WFP.evaluation@WFP.org](mailto:WFP.evaluation@WFP.org)**