

Evaluation Brief

WFP Office of Evaluation: *Measuring Results, Sharing Lessons*



Annual Evaluation Report: 2014

In 2014, the Office of Evaluation (OEV) completed 27 evaluations comprising policy, strategic, country portfolio and single operation evaluations. The evaluations synthesized in this year's Annual Evaluation Report (AER) raise several strategic issues relevant to WFP's ongoing shift from food aid to food assistance, and to the early stages of implementing the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan.

Key Messages

1) The shift “*from implementer to enabler*”, as indicated by WFP's Strategic Plan, continues to progress. While the evaluations confirm its relevance to long-term trends in the external context for WFP's work, the principal lesson from the 2014 evaluations is that moving from food aid to food assistance is still “work in progress” on the ground. Change of the magnitude and depth envisioned, is difficult, takes longer than anticipated and requires enhanced supporting functions across WFP.

2) Evaluations in middle-income countries in 2014 reinforced the lessons reported in the 2013 AER by finding that WFP can make relevant contributions in these dynamic contexts, where inequity of opportunity often results in vulnerability. However, the need for greater clarity and guidance on capacity development strategy was echoed in several other evaluations.

3) Evidence requirements for identifying food assistance results are challenging for WFP's current monitoring systems and capacity. While data on outputs have improved, measurement and analysis at the outcome level are still inadequate. Similarly, while many of the 2014 evaluations confirmed that there is scope for improving the capture of positive results of gender as an outcome area, further development of gender monitoring systems, capacity and culture is needed.

Lessons from Country Portfolio and Operation Evaluations

The work evaluated in three **Country Portfolio (CPE)** and 12 **Operation Evaluations** spanned virtually all the types of activity in which WFP engages in a range of environmental, political and economic contexts. It was found that:

1) The work evaluated was generally well aligned with humanitarian and food-security needs and with host governments' policy frameworks and objectives. While CPEs found strategic coordination and partnership with other agencies - including the Rome-based agencies - to be weak and lacking in synergy, operational partnerships were generally strong;

2) At the same time, WFP is not yet ahead of the curve with regard to the necessary adjustments in funding and reporting, and is often caught short by budget shortfalls that necessitate operational compromises and reduce effectiveness;

3) Gender considerations are not yet fully integrated into WFP operations, while gender-sensitive programme design based on disaggregated data and analysis of major socio-economic groups is lacking; and

4) Overall, while more strategic aspects of WFP's transition from food aid to food assistance were developing satisfactorily, individual operations did not always reflect the transition so well: for instance, in Uganda, implementation was not as coherent as strategy.

Lessons in Emergency Preparedness and Response

Common themes identified from the evaluations of the **Global Food Security Cluster** and WFP's **Use of Pooled Funds** indicated the following broader, systemic strengths and challenges:

1) Significant innovations introduced through the humanitarian reform process have helped improve coordination, benefiting the overall response. WFP has used pooled funds effectively to address specific funding requirements, and has delivered clear benefits to partners through its cluster lead and co-lead roles;

2) System-wide processes and donor-driven reporting demands risk crowding out other more operationally relevant activities, such as coordinated needs assessments, gap identification, monitoring and learning;

3) The availability of sufficient resources for cluster coordination remains a challenge. Currently, neither the commitment of lead agencies nor financial support from pooled funds is consistent;

4) Both systems analysed in the evaluations indicate insufficient focus on preparedness, resilience and transition beyond emergency response, for which engagement by national institutions is essential. While pooled funds are not seen as having comparative advantage in these areas, clusters and/or their lead agencies should play larger roles;

5) Formal integration of gender considerations has increased through enhanced compliance with the IASC's gender marker and the appointment of more gender focal points in clusters. However, little influence on operations was found.

Lessons in Innovation Management

Also in 2014 evaluations were completed of two of WFP's most significant innovations in its recent history, to

support the shift from food aid to food assistance: i. the 2008 Cash & Voucher (C&V) Policy Evaluation; ii. the Final Evaluation of the Purchase for Progress Pilot Initiative.

The 2008 C&V policy established the authorizing basis for major innovation in WFP's transfer modalities, enabling a very rapid increase in WFP's use of C&V transfers from effectively zero in 2008 to their application in 52 countries and across all programme categories, by 2013. However, country offices had to innovate and learn within the very broad parameters set by the Policy. While subsequent guidance and tools supported implementation, these needed updating and more effective dissemination. Greater cross-functional working is needed to address common challenges and bottlenecks, including approval processes for service provider contracts; guidance on retailer and financial partner assessment; corporate monitoring systems suitable for efficiency analysis, and output and outcome measurement by modality.

The five year P4P initiative was WFP's largest formal pilot to date, developing and testing ways of leveraging WFP's purchasing power for smallholder farmer benefit. Despite significant lesson-learning efforts, insufficient measurement and data gaps prevented identification of clearly evidenced models. That said, the evaluation confirmed evidence of: positive trends in WFP procurement from farmer organisations (FO's), and of increased FO sales in most countries where data were available. However, there was no evidence that these sales led to increased smallholder farmer incomes, and insufficient attention was paid to socio-economic variation among smallholder farmers and groups. While there were some measurable improvements in FO capacity, this was less and took longer to achieve than envisaged, with evidence of production increase attributable to P4P in just one of the three countries where full impact assessment was conducted.

The two evaluations yielded several common lessons on management of change:

- 1) in the current global contexts, both innovations are highly relevant to WFP's shift from food aid to food assistance;
- 2) Decentralized innovation can be effective but requires strong central guidance, support and leadership;
- 3) WFP's current M&E systems and capacity are challenged by evidence requirements for identifying successful innovations;
- 4) Limitations in M&E and financing reporting systems are barriers to measuring efficiency, costs, effectiveness and long-term outcomes, including gender implications; and
- 5) High-quality systems for disseminating guidance and learning are essential for mainstreaming innovations and maintaining consistent quality;

6) Strong management of the changes needed to support systems is essential for effective mainstreaming of new approaches to food assistance.

Recommendations

Four overarching systemic recommendations were derived from the synthesis:

Recommendation 1. Reconfirm WFP's commitment to its **leadership role in inter-agency coordination** of humanitarian response, and ensure consistent support for coordination at country level;

Recommendation 2. Increase **support to country offices' adoption of food assistance approaches and modalities**;

Recommendation 3. Enhance WFP's accountability and strengthen country offices' ability to **manage for results**; and

Recommendation 4. Increase the focus of WFP's country strategy and programme design on alignment with **national/local systems, and strategies for capacity development** and policy advice.

WFP Evaluation Function Update

The 2014 Peer Review of WFP's Evaluation Function by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) was presented to WFP's Executive Board. It rated the central evaluation function highly, reflecting an assessment by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) that placed it high in the league of UN evaluation functions. Strong, effective mechanisms exist for safeguarding evaluation independence, and evaluations were found to be highly credible, with WFP respecting and responding to them. However, OEV was found to have insufficient capacity to carry out all the functions it is expected to perform. While OEV's shift over recent years to evaluation of WFP's policies, strategies, country portfolios and impacts was found appropriate, evaluation coverage at the operational level had declined, with inadequate resources, guidance and support for decentralized evaluation. The management response committed WFP to significant development of its evaluation function under a combined centralised and demand-led decentralised model to be enshrined in a new Evaluation Policy. The **2016-2021 Evaluation Policy** was approved at the November, 2015 Executive Board, and will be accompanied by a **Charter** enshrining the mandate and augmented role and responsibilities of OEV, including for the decentralized evaluation function, and an **Evaluation Strategy** for implementing the policy across WFP.

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