WFP Evaluations concerning Safety Nets

Introduction

Social protection and safety nets are important components of national systems to promote development and within which other assistance can and should be aligned. WFP’s strategic plan and the 2004 safety net policy seek to position WFP as an integrated part of social protection and safety net systems. The Top 10 Lessons here are synthesized from 18 WFP evaluations since 2006 of WFP operations across the globe that relate to safety nets and 9 thematic or strategic evaluations covering key cross-cutting program development elements. In addition, a number of external evaluations of food-based safety nets were reviewed to help identify lessons.

The ‘Top 10 Lessons’ series is intended to be of practical value, primarily to field staff, in planning and implementing WFP operations. Drawn from evaluations of past operations, they summarise ways to tackle 10 key challenges that have been encountered by others before on a selected topic. They are not policy directives, but have been compiled within the current policy framework and are in line with WFP’s mission and mandate.

Background

WFP’s work in safety nets is not a new phenomenon, however focus on such work has been gaining attention within WFP in recent years in response to changing internal and external factors.

There are a range of definitions for safety nets among different organizations and experts. In WFP, safety nets are defined as: “formal or informal non-contributory transfers provided to people vulnerable to or living in poverty, malnutrition and other forms of deprivation”. Safety net transfers should be non-contributory, i.e. requiring no payment by beneficiaries (e.g. such as premiums when purchasing insurance), and be provided publicly. Safety nets transfers can include conditional transfers, unconditional transfers and public and community works. Safety nets are only a component of broader social protection systems that include insurance, and social services.

The 2011 strategic evaluation of WFP’s Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets considered four primary quality criteria, or principles of good practice, which are:

Adequate: sufficient to meet people’s needs
Timely: both on time and at the right time
Predictable: regular, so people know it is coming and can plan accordingly
Sustainable: both financially and politically
As a subset of social protection systems, safety nets may have a variety of purposes. In the short term, they may focus on protecting people and enabling them to survive periods of stress and shock. Longer-term objectives include mitigating shocks or reducing the risk of crises occurring. Increasingly safety nets are also being designed with the aim of strengthening livelihoods and reducing chronic poverty.

WFP workshops in 2009 and 2011 brought together senior staff to discuss ways for WFP to be more effective when working with safety nets, and where efforts to integrate into national social protection and safety net systems are appropriate.

The Strategic Evaluation of WFP’s Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation (OE) contributed to internal consideration of these issues and has helped to increase understanding of this area and its relevance for WFP. However, WFP staff have requested more detailed and practical-level lessons and information than was reported in the evaluation summary report.

This Top 10 Lessons document seeks to provide some of this additional practical information and is organized based on three categories – lessons regarding results, lessons regarding external factors affecting performance, and lessons regarding internal factors affecting performance.

**Lesson 1:** Many WFP operations have a time-bound safety net effect, but in order to be an effective safety net, support needs to be adequate, timely and predictable.

**Summary:** WFP programmes often have the intended effects of alleviating hunger and saving lives, which serves protective safety net purposes. Different instruments require different considerations to effectively meet good practice standards of being adequate, timely and predictable. Some instruments tend to more frequently serve as safety nets, which promote livelihoods in addition to protecting lives.

**Experiences from the field:** WFP operations have been found to have life-saving safety net effects by allowing people to survive periods of stress or shock. The 2010 evaluation of the Ethiopia Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) found that relief, Government of Ethiopia Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) and Targeted School Feeding (TSF) components of the programme delivered transfers to millions of people which saved lives, prevented acute hunger, reduced the risk of chronic hunger and addressed under nutrition.

The 2010 evaluation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory PRRO noted that WFP food assistance through general food distribution (GFD), food for work (FFW) and food for training (FFT) helped to mitigate the worst effects of the economic crisis on food security.

Experiences with different instruments shows the ways in which quality criteria
(e.g. adequate, timely, predictable and sustainable) interact with program design and implementation decisions to increase the safety net effects of WFP programmes.

School feeding programmes have been shown to enable people to survive shocks and also to strengthen livelihoods when implemented predictably and without interruption. The 2007 evaluation of WFP School Feeding in Emergency Situations, the 2010 evaluations of WFP School Feeding in Gambia and Kenya, and the 2011 evaluations of WFP School Feeding in Cambodia and Cote d’Ivoire all found that school feeding has a significant value transfer effect when programmes provide predictable and reliable delivery of food, positively increasing household income and freeing up time for productive activities.

The value of the transfer from school feeding appears to be highest for the most vulnerable groups of beneficiaries. School feeding linked to take home rations (THR) appears to have the greatest value transfer effects and also shows evidence of enabling beneficiaries to be more resilient during lean periods. The 2011 evaluation of school feeding in Cambodia specifically noted that THR is an adequate approach for targeting specifically vulnerable people and has the potential to function as a safety net mechanism.

General Food Distribution (GFD), especially in emergency operations, is aimed primarily at protecting lives of people but can also help free up income and enable household investments in other non-food areas. When GFD is continued as part of a recovery operation to fill a gap in national food safety nets (often in a PRRO or Country Programme (CP) it is more likely to have a sustainable protective effect and may contribute to promoting livelihoods when the amount of assistance is sufficient.

The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions noted that the greatest impact of WFP assistance is sometimes achieved simply by continuing relief. This evaluation found that in certain contexts where people’s livelihoods are recovering, WFP GFD assistance is likely to have recovery impacts by helping people to meet basic needs, which frees up income and enables people to make investments in their own recovery.

FFW, FFT and food for assets (FFA) are generally designed to protect from shocks and strengthen livelihoods, however their scale, duration, value of transfers, challenges in targeting and frequent interruptions limit their impact as seen in the 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions, the 2009 and 2010 evaluations of the Malawi and Egypt Country Programmes, the 2006 and 2010 evaluations of the Central America, OPT and Timor-Lest PRROs. The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions specifically expressed concerns that FFA activities seem to frequently be of smaller scale with lower coverage, which can limit impact.

FFA, FFW and FFT programmes provide opportunities for WFP to model safety nets, and demonstrate their potential impact. The 2010 evaluation of the
Egypt CP noted that FFA programmes have led to increased government commitment to pursue safety nets designed to reduce food insecurity in certain areas.

FFW and FFA programmes can have positive effects on improving livelihoods by increasing income, creating community assets and the environment. Positive examples of longer-term improvements in household assets and livelihoods were identified in the 2010 evaluation of the Rwanda Country Portfolio. The 2010 evaluation of the Nepal Country Portfolio found that WFP has been effective in building community assets through FFW, FFA and cash for assets (CFA) projects which reached large numbers of people, reduced immediate food shortages and protected assets and livelihoods in the short-term. However this evaluation found the evidence less clear that these programmes have created longer-term household assets or improved long-term livelihoods conditions. Country programme and portfolio evaluations in 2009 and 2010 in Rwanda, Nepal, Malawi and Egypt found mixed evidence of longer-term improvements in household assets and livelihoods conditions from FFW and FFA programmes.

FFT can promote livelihoods outcomes as part of a safety net if skills being developed are linked to demand in the job market and other services which provide job placement. The 2010 evaluation of the OPT PRRO noted that more attention should be given to providing training related to marketable skills and to developing partnerships that would support graduates of such training to be employed using the skills they had acquired.

Maternal and Child Nutrition and Health (MCNH) programmes can provide a platform for serving as a safety net during crises while also promoting health outcomes which can improve livelihoods. The 2006 thematic evaluation of WFP Supported Mother and Child Nutrition Interventions found that in all of its country studies MCNH programmes appeared to function as a food safety net during crises because they provide an existing food-distribution mechanism for reaching the most vulnerable groups when a crisis occurs.

Vulnerable Group Development and Feeding (VGD/VGF) programmes were shown to be effective in increasing productive assets of beneficiaries in the 2010 evaluation of the Bangladesh Country Programme. However, the 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions evaluation found that VGD/VGF often suffers from unpredictability and therefore has limited its use as a livelihood protection instrument in some context.

**Lesson 2:** Sustainability of WFP safety net programs and outcomes requires adequate funding, government capacity building, and long-term assistance to beneficiaries that is adequate and predictable. Safety nets which are manageable at scale, over longer periods of time and developed and implemented in partnership with governments are most likely to become sustainable.

**Summary:** Long-term sustainability of safety nets implies that they become incorporated
into national policies and systems which requires strategic, political and financial commitments from the government as well as technical and programmatic capacities. Building government capacity and commitment requires gradual efforts to encourage and enable transition to ownership, rather than abrupt handover. When initiating programs and operations WFP should balance the need for expediency with the need to develop partner capacities.

Once programs are transitioned to government ownership WFP can transition from an operational role towards advisory and technical support roles, which can help the government by providing added legitimacy and independent feedback on potential gaps and programme improvements.

**Experiences from the field:** The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions noted that in several countries external funding constraints forced WFP to abruptly cease, rather than to phase out, planned activities. This evaluation suggested the need for more planned and gradual transitions when faced with funding or pipeline constraints.

The 2008 evaluation of WFP’s Capacity Development Policy and Operations found that emergency response, especially in relation to recurrent shocks, is more effective when carried out in the context of longer-term strategies for capacity building and resilience. This evaluation noted that operations often begin with a ‘supply side focus’ and gradually evolve as their effectiveness is shown to be more ‘demand driven’. Examples from Ethiopia’s MERET and EFSRA programmes are cited where demand and supply for capacity development assistance meet and become driven by government processes and expectations.

This evaluation suggests that the term “handover” is in fact a poor fit for the good practices of capacity development as it suggests an abrupt shift, rather than an ongoing process of shifting responsibilities for programme management and implementation as capacities are built. The risk of substituting (by implementing without key partners or embedding staff in partner agencies to provide technical and analytical support rather than developing their ability to sustainably conduct such work) rather than building capacity of partners is also raised in this evaluation and is a particular problem where WFP is focused on its central role of strengthening programming capacities. The evaluation suggests that WFP may need to pro-actively manage the transition to a WFP advisory or management oversight role where there is an ongoing need for an external partner to stay engaged to ensure continued quality, transparency and enhance credibility. In the early stages after a transition, WFP’s continued involvement at such levels helps to reassure stakeholders that expected levels and quality of service will continue.

The 2009 strategic evaluation of the
Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions suggested that exit strategies should include advocacy with donors and national governments to develop policies and programmes that can address needs previously covered by WFP as it transitions out of a service delivery role.

Sustainability of assets and livelihoods depends on adequacy of transfers, duration of assistance and often requires complementary programmes that more comprehensively address vulnerability. The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions found that in Ethiopia the debate about sustainability is partly around whether or not the objective to ‘graduate’ people from chronic food insecurity, through a combination of PSNP transfers and other food interventions, is in fact achievable. It notes that while food assistance on its own is seen as being inadequate, generating enough complementary programming to allow ‘graduation’ continues to be challenging.

The 2009 evaluation of the Bangladesh Country Programme found that while average values of productive assets had increased, incomes of beneficiaries were still low and just over half of participants had been able to ‘graduate’ to microfinance programmes. In the 2010 evaluation of the Nepal Country Portfolio the timeframe for livelihood recovery activities was found to be too short to sustainably restore essential assets.

Lesson 3: WFP’s analytical capacities and experience delivering at scale are its greatest comparative advantage for contributing to sustainable safety nets.

Summary: WFP’s vulnerability assessment capacities have allowed it to help partners institutionalize evidence based monitoring and targeting and make contributions to safety net partnerships and consortia in terms of designing, monitoring and adjusting safety net programmes. Efforts to share and transfer vulnerability assessment skills and analysis also enable WFP to influence national policies. WFP’s ability to deliver at scale provides a comparative advantage for helping fill gaps in national safety nets.

Experiences from the field: The 2008 evaluation of WFP’s Capacity Development Policy and Operations notes that policy influence and information sharing through analysis, advocacy and regional networks are effective in building political commitment and agreements as a basis for adopting national policies and strategies. WFP vulnerability analysis and needs assessments in all regions and countries were an area of comparative advantage as reported in Country Portfolio and operations evaluations. For example, in Bangladesh, WFP vulnerability assessment and mapping (VAM) and other analytical efforts effectively strengthened the Government of Bangladesh’s capacity in resource allocation and targeting for its safety net programmes.

In Rwanda, the analytical work funded by WFP and partners was strongly aligned with the demand from government partners for planning, and information on
hunger and food security, which led to the development of the Food Security Monitoring System and helped to place food security and nutrition on the national agenda.

In Kenya WFP’s participation and leadership in key food security meetings and steering groups allowed WFP to use its analytical capacities, particularly through VAM, helped ensure effective coordination of response by the government at national and district levels along with that of other UN agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

In Egypt WFP provided capacity building assistance to the government by helping establish an advisory unit within the Ministry of Social Solidarity. This analytical capacity building assistance was intended to help the government identify ways to reform Egyptian food subsidy systems.

The ability of WFP to deliver at scale is also cited as a key comparative advantage related to safety nets. WFP’s unique and significant food logistics capacities fill gaps in national food safety nets and help build government capacity. The 2010 evaluation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory PRRO noted that WFP’s support to institutional feeding was a critical means of augmenting the Palestinian National Authority’s declining capacity to meet the needs of those in institutional care, as an interim measure until the government was able to fully resume its responsibilities.

However some livelihoods recovery programmes tend not to take advantage of WFP’s capacity for delivering at scale. The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions found consistently that fewer recovery activities are implemented than planned and FFA activities in particular seem to be consistently small-scale with low coverage.

Many aspects of sustainable large-scale national social safety nets fall outside of WFP’s niche – including pension and insurance schemes, categorical welfare (e.g. widows, disabled) and long term infrastructure projects.

Lessons Regarding the Main External Factors Affecting Performance

**Lesson 4:** Predictable and adequate funding is critical for safety nets by enabling sufficient duration and value of the transfer and limiting pipeline breaks and other interruptions in assistance.

**Summary:** Challenges in fully funding WFP’s programmes have often forced country offices to rebalance priorities or limit programme implementation in ways that reduce the overall value or regularity of transfers. When planned support does not arrive or is less than planned, the safety net effect of programmes is reduced.

**Experiences from the field:** Evaluations in Cambodia, The Gambia, Egypt, Malawi, Ethiopia, Guatemala and Timor-Lest show that funding constraints
can lead to delays or interruptions in transfers or reductions in the amount of assistance provided. Such tradeoffs can undermine the timeliness, predictability and adequacy of transfers and reduce the effectiveness of the intervention as a safety net.

The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions stressed that for livelihoods recovery assistance to be effective it also needs to be timely.

Delays in delivery of transfers were found to restrict household investments in protecting livelihoods and risk mitigation measures in the 2010 evaluation of the Ethiopia PRRO. This evaluation notes that timeliness and predictability of transfers are critical factors for reducing negative coping strategies and households which receive unpredictable and lower than intended level of transfers are much more likely to engage in distress sale of assets.

The 2010 evaluation of the Timor-Lest PRRO found that while FFA activities were successful in some cases, a seven month gap in service provision led to only one third of the project’s targets being achieved.

Evaluations in Egypt, Malawi, Central America and the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) found that funding shortfalls require a country office to rebalance priorities. Shortfalls appear to have greatest impact on FFW/FFA livelihoods oriented interventions as country offices prioritize life-saving GFD as well as more institutionalized school feeding.

The 2010 evaluation of the OPT PRRO found that the recovery components failed to meet targets, particularly in FFW, due to financial shortfalls that led to the prioritization of relief interventions.

The reduction of WFP’s impact due to funding shortfalls is also shown as recovery interventions are cut back leading to widespread sharing of rations and households only being able to work for a short time on FFA projects in the 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions.

In Kenya, WFP plans to support a disaster preparedness facility were meant to provide a safety net for chronically food insecure communities to build assets against recurrent droughts. However the 2008 evaluation of the Kenya Emergency Operation and CP found that the programme was unfortunately suspended shortly after becoming operational due to demands to divert resources to GFD under the emergency operation.

Inadequacy of funding limits the timeframes and volume of assistance provided in many livelihoods recovery programmes. The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions found that WFP food assistance is less effective at supporting recovery processes by restoring key productive assets for building stronger livelihoods because timeframes are often too short. This evaluation also suggested that such activities need to be implemented earlier and simultaneously with relief for food assistance to support sustained
improvements in livelihoods.

In Central America, the 2006 evaluation of the Central America PRRO found that FFW outcomes for asset creation achieved were limited overall because rations were few and irregular.

**Lesson 5:** The country's economic and policy contexts play a significant role in determining the space for WFP to contribute to safety nets and the best combination of programme activities required.

**Summary:** Contextual factors found to affect WFP’s ability to achieve safety net outcomes included government policies, implementing partner capacities, stability, market functioning and fluctuations in prices, and supportiveness of communities within a country and individual communities.

**Experiences from the field:** Policies of national governments and the policy environment in a country can affect the demand for particular types of WFP assistance, constrain or enable its ability to implement programs based on good practice, and determine the impact of capacity building efforts.

The impact of national and local policies which can constrain implementation based on good practice can be seen in school feeding examples from Cote d’Ivoire and Gambia. The 2010 evaluation of Gambia School Feeding and 2011 evaluation of Cote d’Ivoire School feeding show the negative effects of national policies that require payment for school meals. Both evaluations found that the payments, where still required, reduced the value transfer of meals and thus the ability of school feeding to serve as a safety net. In Cote d’Ivoire the evaluation found that as a result of the required payments the rations were not always being given to the same children – since children in the same household may have taken turns to receive money for meals. The evaluation notes that this undermines learning, safety net and nutrition outcomes.

In the case of Malawi, government policy focus was shifting in ways that created an enabling environment for safety nets. The 2009 CP evaluation found that as food security conditions improved in the country the government’s agenda was shifting towards focus on social protection and development programmes. This paralleled a focus on food security by new government leaders. The result of these changes in the national policy environment were an increase in ‘upstream support’ – or capacity building, technical advice and policy inputs – related to social protection and development. WFP was found to be making efforts to meet the increasing requests for food, technical and policy inputs to government social protection programmes in the areas of food, nutrition, school feeding, HIV/AIDS, and through vulnerability assessment and disaster preparedness work.

The 2010 evaluation of the Egypt Country Programme documented WFP's
efforts to contribute capacity building assistance and technical support to enable the government to review and revise its national food subsidy systems. Despite these efforts, the evaluation concluded that a possible lack of government commitment and political will to reform food subsidies limited WFP’s potential to achieve its capacity building and policy goals in Egypt.

The capacity of implementing partners has also been frequently cited as a key factor affecting WFP’s ability to implement safety net programmes that are timely, predictable and adequate. The 2007 evaluation of WFP School Feeding in Emergency Situations found that low capacities of local partners and governments make responding to large-scale needs in a timely manner challenging for school feeding in emergencies. The 2006 evaluation of the Central American PRRO and 2009 evaluations of the Malawi Country Portfolio and Burkina Faso PRRO found that weak capacity among implementing partners negatively affected performance and implementation (predictability and adequacy), and timeliness. Similar concerns were raised in the 2010 evaluations of the Guatemala and Timor-Leste PRROs as well as the 2006 thematic evaluation of Targeting in WFP Relief Operations.

Environments characterized by conflict and instability also present challenges and opportunities. The 2009 evaluation of School Feeding in Cote d’Ivoire found that prior to the conflict WFP support to a nationally owned program was strongly justified, but once the conflict erupted and the government lost control of 60% of the country, WFP linkages to the government did not fully serve the education and safety net objectives of WFP’s school feeding programme.

The interruption of government safety nets in conflict environments can also create opportunities for WFP to fill gaps. The 2009 evaluation of Cote d’Ivoire School Feeding also noted that the gaps created by the conflict in areas no longer controlled by the government led to WFP establishment of emergency operations in these areas aimed at protection of human and productive assets. The 2010 evaluation of the Nepal Country Portfolio found that when the government reduced coverage of districts by one-third during the conflict WFP filled gaps in food distribution and advocated against the government’s position to eliminate support for these areas.

Security restrictions and limited accessibility to areas affected by conflicts were also identified as limiting WFP’s ability to respond to large scale needs in a timely way particularly for school feeding in the 2007 thematic evaluation of WFP School Feeding in Emergency Situations.

Community and institutional context is cited in a number of evaluations as affecting the potential for WFP to achieve safety net objectives. In the 2010 evaluation of Kenya School Feeding the linkages between school feeding objectives and factors which drive broader learning, health and livelihoods outcomes are highlighted. The evaluation stresses that school feeding in the absence of appropriate learning environments and family/community support is a weak intervention limited mostly to food security. The 2011
evaluation of Cambodia School Feeding notes that the types of threats causing vulnerability, as well as their frequency and recurrence, determines the degree to which school feeding can be an effective safety net.

Market forces related to food and basic goods has also been shown to affect the impact of safety net interventions and also affects the design of WFP safety net interventions and WFPs ability to be flexible. The 2010 evaluation of the OPT PRRO notes that in places where economic infrastructure exists and is functioning what matters most is the economic value of resources transferred, rather than the nature of the resources transferred. In these cases, where market mechanisms are able to deliver support by voucher or cash, such mechanism are cited as having a considerable advantage and preference by the population.

The 2010 evaluation of the Bangladesh CP noted that safety net outcomes are susceptible to economic pressures such as food prices - which means that programmes must be regularly adjusted to keep pace with such trends. The 2010 mid-term evaluation of the Ethiopia PRRO similarly noted that increased food prices had reduced the value of cash transfers in the PSNP, which required WFP and other partners to increase the volume of food transfers to compensate.

Lesson 6: Effective safety nets require comprehensive partnerships between the government, local organizations and potentially international agencies. Such partnerships provide opportunities for greater programme impact as well as policy influence.

Summary: Safety nets are often oriented to meeting sometimes overwhelming needs in the countries where WFP works. WFP’s comparative advantages give it a significant role to play in developing and implementing safety nets but effective partnerships are required to maximize impact. Partnerships with national governments and other national actors are critical to ensuring long-term sustainability and predictability. When WFP’s analytical skills are applied to joint efforts to raise awareness of gaps and needs and advocate for establishment or improvement of safety nets its voice is multiplied and more likely to impact national policies and programmes.

Experiences from the field: In Kenya partnerships played a key role in enabling school feeding to be effectively implemented and achieve its safety net effects. The 2010 evaluation of school feeding in Kenya found that a comprehensive approach involving cross-sector, interagency collaboration is required to maximize the benefits of school feeding. This involves a dense and active network of partnerships with government, UN agencies and NGOs.

In Ethiopia the complex partnership in the PSNP led to improved coordination and greater safety net effects. The 2010 mid-term evaluation of the Ethiopia PRRO notes that the PSNP partnership, which WFP played a role in developing, established new ways of working, with stronger coordination mechanisms to support implementation.
Partnerships help enable WFP to have greater policy influence on safety net issues. The 2008 evaluation of WFP's Capacity Development Policy and Operations notes that studies led by WFP in Latin America demonstrate how partnerships with academic, government, humanitarian and development organizations can raise awareness of food security and nutritional issues and provide a foundation for influencing policies that create or improve safety nets.

Active WFP participation in existing coordination structures and social protection platforms can also help position WFP to influence policies related to safety nets. In the 2010 evaluation of the Rwanda Country Portfolio WFP's role as the co-chair of the UNCT thematic working group on sustainable growth and social protection is cited as positioning WFP to promote an agenda focused on nutrition, vulnerability and food security. Similarly, WFP’s interaction with key Rwanda government ministries in monthly meetings enabled it to influence policy and strategy for national safety nets.

The 2011 strategic evaluation of WFP’s Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets found that donors are increasingly devoting their resources for social protection to programmes implemented under well-coordinated national social protection platforms. The evaluation found that WFP safety nets work is more effective and more likely to receive donor support when WFP is actively engaged in such platforms and works in partnership with other agencies and institutions with complementary skills and experience.

**Lesson 7:** Staff skills related to livelihoods, public administration/policy, and nutrition analysis should be built in WFP country offices while reinforcing vulnerability and needs analysis skills and basic literacy regarding safety nets and social protection to improve WFPs ability to engage in policy discussions regarding the appropriate role of food assistance in safety net programs.

**Summary:** Safety nets, as a subset of social protection, are ideally owned by national governments. As such they are enabled and guided by national policies. In order to contribute to the establishment and maintenance of effective food based safety nets, WFP staff should engage in policy discussions and undertake other efforts to influence and enable policy decision-makers. In order to play this role effectively, WFP staff skills need to be built in areas related to safety nets and social protection, as well as associated topics such as livelihoods.

**Experiences from the field:** The ability of WFP staff to engage with organisations and institutions that play critical roles in social protection policy discussions is critical for enabling WFP to have a lasting impact in safety net programs. The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions found that WFP staff need to be prepared with
appropriate skills and capacities to engage with a different set of institutions than they have traditionally, including different government agencies, the World Bank, NGOs and donors. WFP needs to be able to articulate a clear role for itself within longer-term social protection programming and strategies and needs greater capacity to engage in policy debates around food security and livelihoods, safety nets and the appropriate role of food assistance.

The 2006 thematic review of Targeting in WFP Relief Operations stresses that political analysis is critical for targeting because political influences will always be evident in targeting processes. The evaluation suggests that WFP needs to take account of the institutions and governance structures which play a role in determining targeting (or enabling/undermining targeting) to maximize the equity of distribution.

Lesson 8: Close engagement with national governments in the design and implementation of safety nets can create dilemmas for humanitarian organizations in certain contexts, which should be carefully considered by WFP.

Summary: Good practice in safety nets requires efforts to identify ways of building institutional national capacity for their long-term sustainability. However, as a humanitarian agency, WFP must balance the interests of sustainable long-term safety nets with its need to maintain independence and related humanitarian principles.

Experiences from the field: Tensions between humanitarian principles and principles of good practice for safety nets can arise specifically in relation to the desire to build government capacity and provide support to nationally owned safety net systems.

The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions noted that these tensions have been highlighted in Ethiopia where WFP support to PSNP has both been an important part of generating government ownership through a shift from relief to longer-term support for social protection while also creating issues for WFP in relation to its independence and ability to influence and be critical of the government when Capacity development initiatives focused on policy-making stakeholders at inter-ministerial and ministerial levels are cited as an important means for WFP to influence programmes and policies in the 2008 evaluation of WFP’s Capacity Development Policy and Operations. The evaluation notes that such efforts to build capacity of policy-makers is equally, if not sometimes more, important than ensuring adequate capacities for implementation.

In the 2010 evaluation of the Egypt Country Programme limited nutrition and vulnerability/poverty analysis capacity are cited as key impediments to ensuring high quality work and a sustained focus on key policy issues and government capacity building.
needed on humanitarian grounds.

In Nepal the same evaluation noted that WFP deliberately limited its policy and program relationships with the government for a period of time to avoid politicization and maintain its independence during the conflict. However this is cited as limiting WFP’s ability to develop government capacity and influence institutional policy-making.

**Lesson 9:** Targeting for safety nets should include community and household data, be conducted in multi-agency partnerships where feasible, and seek to minimize exclusion and inclusion errors to the extent possible.

**Summary:** Targeting for safety nets requires complementing geographic targeting with additional community and household data, which can help prevent exclusion errors. Multi-agency targeting for safety net programmes better inform policy-making and resist politicization. Where national policies and safety net systems require national coverage programme design should pay specific attention to inclusion errors.

**Experiences from the field:**
Multiple evaluations suggest that geographic targeting needs to be complemented with community and household data to allow WFP to design effective safety nets.

The Synthesis of WFP Evaluations Bearing on the Subject of Targeting 2000-2006 notes that household food economy or other in-depth studies of socio-economic status and coping mechanisms are particularly useful in developing livelihood building strategies and such information is needed to support VAM analysis and to harmonize geographic and household targeting. The same synthesis stresses that vulnerability analysis at household level is almost invariably required to identify the most at risk communities and households.

The 2006 thematic review of Targeting in WFP Relief Operations states that geographical targeting does not appear to be explicitly linked to objectives for protecting livelihoods or avoiding distress sales of assets.

The lack of appropriate mechanisms to conduct local needs assessments is cited in the 2007 thematic evaluation of WFP School Feeding in Emergency Situations as limiting the appropriateness and accuracy of targeting strategies. The 2010 evaluation of OPT PRRO notes that targeting should be based on beneficiary’s socio-economic status and differentiated needs.

Multi-agency targeting is noted as a good practice and an increasingly utilized approach in a number of evaluations. The 2006 thematic review of Targeting in WFP Relief Operations notes that where multi-agency involvement in targeting decisions is lacking perceptions of bias can emerge and political pressures can unduly influence outcomes. This evaluation suggests that multi-agency structures that involve and inform political decision-making through technical advice are a key element of
successful targeting practice and represent a step forward in how WFP conducts targeting in recent years.

Exclusion errors can limit the effectiveness of safety net programs especially where the ‘supply’ of assistance is not able to keep pace with needs, where policies negatively impact programme fidelity and in cases where geographical targeting is used as the first targeting filter.

The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions found that the fundamental targeting issue in Ethiopia’s PSNP programme is that resources are insufficient to cover all chronically food insecure households leading to significant exclusion of people who are as needy as those included in the programme. The 2010 mid-term evaluation of the Ethiopia PRRO noted that the application of targeting measures meant to discern between acute and chronic food insecurity did not accurately reflect the complex nature of vulnerability in Ethiopia and led to exclusion errors.

In Kenya, the 2010 evaluation of Kenya School Feeding programmes found that while WFP explicitly targets the most vulnerable segments of the population, studies have shown that a million or more malnourished children are found in the more privileged districts of the country where no school feeding occurs. The 2010 evaluation of the Nepal Country Portfolio similarly found that while geographical targeting works well for reaching the majority of households facing food insecurity it is not effective at reaching small groups of disadvantaged or those vulnerable communities within better-off areas.

Inclusion errors can also arise due to targeting decisions in safety net programmes, particularly due to ‘self-targeting’ designs and programmes that are mandated to cover an entire territory.

The 2010 evaluation of the Nepal Country Portfolio notes that self-targeting, where individuals and households are given the choice of whether to become beneficiaries, was found to be ineffective in FFW programs resulting in inclusion errors.

The 2009 evaluation of the Mozambique Country Programme found that despite VAM data which shows clear concentrations of vulnerability in certain parts of the country, a national mandate to extend school feeding to all provinces meant that targeting was not based on vulnerability and led to likely inclusion errors. The 2010 evaluation of the Timor-Lest PRRO similarly found that MCHN and school feeding programmes were deliberately and explicitly aligned with government systems and priorities which are country-wide and not targeted according to need which meant that from a vulnerability standpoint inclusion errors were unavoidable.

**Lesson 10:** Monitoring and evaluation of safety nets should be linked closely to targeting, capture qualitative and quantitative data, and shared with partners to improve learning and programme design.
**Summary:** Monitoring and evaluation linked to targeting enable WFP to adjust programme implementation based on changes in needs and context to maximize impact. Monitoring should capture qualitative and quantitative data to enable periodic review of safety net program designs and objectives during implementation to adjust for exclusion and inclusion errors, implementation fidelity issues and changes in context. Lessons gathered through monitoring and evaluating safety nets should be shared and sought among partners to strengthen collective efforts and WFP’s base of knowledge.

**Experiences from the field:**
Monitoring of safety net programmes should be closely inter-linked with targeting and needs assessment and should feed a continuous process of programme adjustments and improvements.

The Synthesis of WFP Evaluations Bearing on the Subject of Targeting 2000-2006 describes targeting as a continuous exercise, generally described as monitoring. The 2009 strategic evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions cites the recurrent need for initial assessments and programme design to be updated throughout implementation of programmes to reflect changing livelihoods needs.

The idea of ‘rolling needs assessments’ is discussed in the 2006 thematic review of Targeting in WFP Relief Operations. This review notes that such ‘rolling assessments’ enabled geographical targeting to be periodically revised during EMOPs implementation to allow for adjustments based on changing conditions.

The 2010 evaluation of the Guatemala PRRO notes that frequent changes in the operating context require regular adjustments to exit strategies during program implementation.

In addition to engaging in a periodic and frequent and inter-linked monitoring and targeting process, numerous evaluations note the need to change the way in which monitoring and evaluation are viewed and conducted within WFP to ensure such analysis has a positive effect on program improvement.

The 2006 thematic review of Mother and Child Nutrition Interventions found that a fairly mechanical reporting of outputs was driving monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at a country level. This minimizes the potential utility of monitoring and evaluation and creates an environment where staff view such efforts as a simple accountability reporting requirement. The evaluation found that this limited approach was creating a disconnection between M&E and programming adjustments.

The 2006 thematic review of Targeting in WFP Relief Operations recommended that WFP staff be encouraged to view M&E as an essential tool for increasing programme effectiveness, rather than a simple accountability mechanism. Increased communication between programme staff and programme support staff responsible for M&E was recommended in the 2010 evaluation of the OPT PRRO as a way to help ensure that monthly analyses are designed and
presented in a way that encourages programme learning and adjustments.

Simply recording and reporting on basic quantitative indicators limits WFP’s ability to learn about the more context related factors that affect the performance of safety net programmes.

The 2009 and 2010 evaluations of the Malawi and Mali CPs cited an absence of good monitoring data, especially data that measures outcomes and impacts of community assets. The 2011 evaluation of the Nepal Country Portfolio found that more quantitative and qualitative data is needed about changes to assets, well-being indicators and income as a result of WFP interventions.

Sharing lessons and jointly analyzing qualitative and quantitative data with partners including the national government, UN agencies, the World Bank and NGOs increases the potential for learning and adjusting programmes to maximize impact. The 2011 strategic evaluation of WFP’s Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets found that WFP was effectively collecting and sharing data with a wide range of partners in Senegal for its cash/voucher pilot projects. At the same time, the World Bank and other partners were also sharing data from similar projects. Collectively this sharing of data was being used to inform discussions of the national social protection platform and future programme design. The Senegal WFP Country Office was also found to be collaborating with the Regional Bureau to develop a regional evaluation of cash/voucher programmes to compare learning from experiences in Senegal and Burkina Faso.
Evaluation reports reviewed

**Thematic**
Full report of the Strategic Evaluation of WFP’s Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets, OE/2011/006
Management response to the Strategic Evaluation of WFP’s Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets, WFP/EB.A/2011/7-B/Add.1
Synthesis report of the Joint Evaluation of Effectiveness and Impact of the Enabling Development Policy of the World Food Programme (WFP), Volumes 1 & 2 and Country Studies from Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Honduras
Full report of the Strategic Evaluation of the Effectiveness of WFP Livelihoods Recovery Interventions, OEDE/003/2009
Summary report of the Thematic Review of WFP-Supported Mother-and-Child Nutrition Interventions, WFP/EB.1/2006/7-C*
Synthesis of WFP evaluations bearing on the subject of targeting 2000 – 2006
Full report of the Thematic Review of Targeting in WFP Relief Operations, OEDE/2006/1
Full report of the Evaluation of WFP’s Capacity Development Policy and Operations, OEDE/2008/3

**School Feeding Evaluations**
Full report of the Evaluation of WFP Cambodia School Feeding (2000-2010), OE/2011/008
Full report of the Evaluation of WFP Gambia School Feeding (2001-2010), OE/2010/017
Full report of the Thematic Evaluation of WFP School Feeding in Emergency Situations, OE/2007/06

**Regional Evaluations**
Full report on the Nutritional Dimensions of Social Safety Nets in Central America and the Dominican Republic, June 2010
Summary of Findings: OMC Region-wide Study on National Food Subsidy & Safety Net Programs: Opportunities for WFP Capacity Support, EB/2/2009

**Country Portfolio Evaluations**
Country evaluation reports were selected by cross-referencing references to countries made in the recent WFP Safety Net Policy Guidance Note and CP evaluations in the Office of Evaluation Database.
Summary report of the Evaluation of Mali Country Portfolio (2003-2009), WFP/EB.1/2011/6-A
Protracted relief and recovery operations
Full report of the Evaluation of Burkina Faso PRRO 10541.0, OE/2009/006
Summary report of the Evaluation of Central America PRRO 10212.0, WFP/EB.2/2006/6-A
Full report of the Mid-term Evaluation of the Ethiopia PRRO 10665.0 (2008-2010), OE/2010/009
Summary report of the Guatemala PRRO 104570, WFP/EB.1/2010/7-D
Full report of the Evaluation of Occupied Palestinian Territory PRRO 10387.1, OE/2010/014
Full report of the Evaluation of Timor-Leste PRRO 10388.1, OE/2010/007

External Evaluation Reports (serve as secondary sources to further inform lessons deriving from WFP evaluations)
ODI. 2009. Targeting of Social Transfers: A Review for DFID.

Other sources (to ensure consistency with prior WFP analysis and existing policy)
Acronyms

Cash for assets CFA
Country Programme CP
Food for assets FFA
Food for training FFT
Food for work FFW
General food distribution GFD
Maternal and Child Nutrition and Health MCNH
Non-governmental Organization NGO
Occupied Palestinian Territory OPT
Office of Evaluation OE
Productive Safety Net Programme PSNP
Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation PRRO
Take Home Rations THR
Targeted School Feeding TSF
Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping VAM
Vulnerable Group Development and Feeding VGD/VGF

Reference:
Full and summary evaluation reports and corresponding Management Responses can be found at:
http://www.wfp.org/about/evaluation

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