Making the choice: Decentralized Evaluation or Review?

(Orientation note)

Draft for comments

Introduction

1.   WFP stands in the frontline of the global fight against hunger. Its operational decisions – which must often be taken under difficult conditions, in fluid and fast-moving circumstances – have an immediate and direct effect on the lives of vulnerable beneficiaries.

2.   Ensuring that significant decisions and choices are based on clear and transparent evidence is key; not just to meet beneficiary needs and realise operational objectives, but to ensure WFP's credibility as a humanitarian and development actor. Consequently, as part of its journey to become 'Fit for Purpose', WFP is placing increased emphasis on *evidence-based decision-making.*

3.   Decentralized evaluations[1] and reviews are a central part of this work. These exercises help WFP and its partners assess performance, and learn about what is working, and what is not. They support WFP to improve its operational decisions; realise its corporate objectives; and bring to light its achievements and reveal areas of underperformance.

Section 1: How to use this Orientation Note

Purpose of this Orientation Note

4.   As part of improving its evidence-based decision-making, this Orientation Note is intended to support WFP staff in selecting between and planning for, a decentralized evaluation or a review of WFP's interventions[2]. Accordingly, it:

- Explains the main purposes and uses of these two exercises;
- Describes the differences and distinctions between them (table presenting distinctive features);
- Supports staff to select one or the other according to their needs (table summarizing key triggers).

5.   This Orientation Note should be used in conjunction with WFP's forthcoming Evaluation Policy, to be considered by the Executive Board in November 2015, [link[3]], Evaluation Policy (forthcoming) [link] and its 2014-2017 Corporate Monitoring Strategy [link]. Associated Guidance is also forthcoming [link].

Who is this Orientation Note for?

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[1] Are called decentralized evaluations: all evaluations commissioned and managed outside WFP's central Office of Evaluation (OEV). See para 21 for further clarifications.
[2] 'Intervention' here refers to the full range of types of operations, activities, programmes etc. in which WFP engages
[3] For your information links to relevant document will be added at a later stage.

6.   This Orientation Note is intended for WFP management and operational staff who have to make a decision between a decentralized evaluation and a review. Specifically, it is aimed at staff working in:

- Country Offices
- Sub/Area Offices
- Regional Bureaus
- Headquarter divisions.

7.   It may also be of interest to staff who might use a decentralized evaluation or review in the future, or who would like to know how these two exercises can support WFP's work.

At what point in the programme cycle should this Orientation Note be used?

8.   Presently, many decentralized evaluations or reviews are conducted on an 'ad hoc' basis, i.e. as or when the need arises. With this Orientation Note and associated Guidance, WFP intends to move towards a more systematic approach, with these exercises better integrated into programme design and planning cycles.

9.   This Orientation Note should accordingly be used:

- **At design stage** – to ensure that decentralized evaluations or reviews are planned into intervention design from the outset, with an allocated budget and staff time.
- **During the Annual Planning and Performance process** – to check that the exercise is still needed; that the timing is still justified; and that the findings will still be used as planned.

10.   However, given the fluid conditions in which WFP works, circumstances can often change fast. Sometimes, the need to conduct a decentralized evaluation or review will only arise whilst activities or operations are already underway. This sort of 'ad hoc' situation is a reality of WFP's work. In these conditions, this Orientation Note can also support decision making.

When should this Orientation note <u>not</u> be used?

11.   This Orientation Note should not be used when the choice of either a decentralized evaluation or review is already clear – e.g. through a donor demand, as a requirement of funding, or through WFP coverage norms[4] for decentralized evaluations. In these circumstances, staff should proceed to the relevant Guidance on either Decentralized Evaluation [link] or Review [link].

What does this Orientation Note cover?

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[4] WFP's coverage norms for decentralized evaluation are still under development and will be clarified after the new evaluation policy under preparation is approved by the EB in November 2015. [insert link] (to be completed when Evaluation Policy prepared)

12.   This Orientation Note introduces the two exercises of a decentralized evaluation and review. Section 2 identifies the key distinctive features between them, and Section 3 identifies triggers to guide staff to decide which one of the two exercises is the most useful at a given point in time.

13.   This Note is specifically focused on decentralized evaluations and reviews, it **does not** address other common WFP exercises such as:

- Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping analysis [link]
- Baseline studies and monitoring data collection [link http://pgm.wfp.org/index.php/General_guidance:Monitoring/Data]
- Feasibility studies [link]
- Lessons Learned exercises after Level 3 emergencies [link to protocol/guidance]
- Strategic Reviews undertaken prior to the development of country strategic plans [link]
- Internal audit processes [link]

14.   These exercises meet different purposes in WFP, and have their own place in the programme cycle, as well as their own approaches and guidance. The information they generate can usefully contribute to decentralized evaluations and reviews, but they are not the focus of this Orientation Note.

15.   This Note is also specific to decentralized evaluation and review in WFP. It does not address wider exercises undertaken as part of the inter-agency system, such as: Operational Peer Reviews (which may feed into Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations for Level 3 emergencies) and UNDAF annual reviews.

16.   Finally, this Note focuses on the decision making process for selecting between decentralized evaluation and review. It does not discuss how to develop an approach and methodology, define roles and responsibilities, or manage the process etc. These areas are covered in the more detailed Guidance, which should be read once the decision – whether decentralized evaluation or review or neither – has been made.

Section 2: Decentralized evaluations and reviews; different exercises for different needs

17.   As Section 1 above explains, decentralized evaluations and reviews form a valuable part of WFP's toolkit to support evidence-based decision-making. However, as different exercises, they have different purposes and uses within WFP's programming cycle. This section of the Orientation Note explains some of the common ground and differences between a decentralized evaluation and a review, to help staff to decide which exercise is best suited for their needs.

Definitions of decentralized evaluations and reviews

18.   For WFP, *decentralized evaluations* are **those evaluations commissioned and managed outside of WFP's central Office of Evaluation** (OEV), including by Country Offices, Regional Offices, or HQ-based divisions and not presented to the Executive Board. They follow the definition of evaluation as defined by the UN's Evaluation Group:[5]

DECENTRALIZED EVALUATION

'An assessment that is as systematic and impartial as possible. It focuses on expected and actual accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality to understand achievements or the lack thereof. It aims to determine the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of WFP's activities, operations and policies (as applicable), and their contribution to the development and humanitarian processes of countries that receive WFP assistance.'[6]

More specifically for WFP:
- All decentralized evaluations contribute to both objectives of accountability and learning, with emphasis on one or the other.
- They may happen at mid-term or at the end of operations, activities, or pilot initiatives, and/or cover thematic areas, transfer modalities or any other area of institutional performance;
- They may take place at the national, sub-national level or regional level;
- They may be wholly managed by WFP, or conducted with WFP participation as part of a joint initiative;
- They apply international evaluation criteria, plus a UN System Wide Action Plan (UNSWAP) standard on gender;[7]
- They <u>must</u> be conducted by independent consultants or firms;
- Their findings <u>must</u> be publicly shared, particularly with the main external stakeholders.

19.   *Reviews* are part of the performance management function of WFP, and fall under the corporate responsibility of WFP's Performance Management and Monitoring Division (RMP). They are defined as follows[8]:

REVIEW

Periodic or *ad hoc* assessment of the performance of a programmatic intervention, or a specific aspect of a programmatic intervention, intended to inform operational decision-making and/or learning. A review tends to focus on operational issues, and is typically managed internally, to enable timely decision making and potential adjustments to an on-going programme.

More specifically:

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- All reviews, whether planned or *ad hoc*, should provide useful information for decision-making;
- Reviews may occur at the early stage of an emergency, mid-term or end of operations/activities/pilot initiatives, transfer modalities or may cover thematic areas;
- Reviews are primarily for internal users, and can be conducted internally;
- Reviews do not have to conform to specified external reporting or publication requirements; or to the international standards applicable to evaluation, but must address the UNSWAP standard on gender.

Reasons for conducting decentralized evaluations and reviews in WFP

20.   Decentralized evaluations and reviews are different exercises, but are both conducted for two main reasons in WFP:

- *Learning:* to help WFP and its partners to learn from experience, by discovering whether particular programmatic interventions   have worked or not, and understanding why they have proven relatively successful or unsuccessful in particular contexts; and
- *Accountability:* to assess and report on the performance and results to donors, host governments and to partners, where WFP is working jointly, as well as to the beneficiaries served.

21.   The balance of accountability and learning may vary – but all decentralized evaluations address both these aims, and reviews focus more on learning, but can also address accountability.

Main subjects of decentralized evaluations and reviews

22.   Both decentralized evaluations and reviews can cover different subjects, at different scales – from the local to the multi-country. As follows:

Subject of decentralized evaluations and reviews	*Geographic scope of decentralized evaluations and reviews*
- Activities e.g. school feeding, nutrition, food for assets, general food distribution - Operations (PRROs, DEV/CPs, EMOPs, Special Operations, Trust Funds) - Thematic areas e.g. gender - Transfer modalities e.g. cash and vouchers - Early Action Review (for reviews only) - Pilot projects	- An area within a country (region, district, locality, or several such areas) - Country level - Multi-country (transnational)

23.   There is no 'right' subject or geographic scope for a decentralized evaluation or review – this depends entirely on the needs and requirements of the relevant Commissioning Unit.

What are the key features of decentralized evaluations /reviews?

24.   As they serve different purposes and needs, decentralized evaluations and reviews have different features. The following table summarises the main distinctions:

Table 1: Key distinctive features of decentralised evaluations and reviews

Feature	Decentralized evaluation	Review
Purpose	**<u>Both accountability and learning</u>** – but may emphasise one more than the other. Often focused on achievement of/progress towards intended and unintended results.	**<u>Mainly learning oriented</u>** and geared towards operational decision making.
Coverage	Covers operations, activities, pilot initiatives, thematic areas, , transfer modalities and any other area of institutional performance.	Covers operations, activities, pilot initiatives, thematic areas, , transfer modalities, **<u>early action review of emergencies</u>** and any other area of institutional performance.
Intended user	**<u>Both external and internal users</u>** Most likely to be used by Country Offices, Donors, Government, National stakeholders, partners. Can also be used by Regional Bureaus and Headquarters.	**<u>Primarily for internal users</u>** Most likely to be used by Country Offices and partners. Can also be used by Regional Bureaus and Headquarters.
Timing	Can be mid-term, final, *ad hoc* or **<u>post-hoc</u>** (any time after completion of intervention).	Can be mid-term, final or *ad-hoc*
Impartiality	**<u>More impartial</u>** than review as it must be conducted by independent consultants.	**<u>Less impartial</u>** when conducted internally.
Focus	**<u>Must apply some or all of international evaluation criteria</u>** of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, plus other relevant humanitarian criteria including connectedness, appropriateness, coherence, coverage and coordination. Must meet UNSWAP criterion on Gender.	Usually relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. **<u>Not required to apply standard evaluation criteria</u>** but should address UNSWAP criterion on Gender.

Data capture, methods and analysis	**Requires application of systematic, comprehensive and transparent analytical methods throughout the process,** including identifying data sources, collecting and analysing data, and consulting stakeholders. **Requires systematic integration of external perspectives** (i.e. from outside of WFP) and **triangulation** across multiple data sources.	**Emphasis on methodology varies** according to type, scope and focus of reviews
Norms and Standards	**Follows the United Nation Evaluation Group Norms and standards**[9]	**No international standards applied** in reviews but Guidance provided incorporates good practice standards
Dissemination	**The report must be disseminated externally** and made publically available. Not presented to the Executive Board.	**The report/ findings may be retained internally** or disseminated externally as appropriate. Not presented to the Executive Board.
Duration and cost	**Usually longer timeframes** than for reviews due to adopting a more rigorous approach, and having an often broader scope. **Cost may therefore be higher** than for reviews.	**Usually a shorter timeframe** than for a decentralized evaluation, due to following a more informal approach and having an often narrower scope. **Cost may therefore be lower** than for decentralized evaluations.

Added value of decentralized evaluations and reviews for WFP's work

25.   Decentralized evaluations and reviews add value to WFP's operational work in a number of ways:

1. *They help WFP realise its corporate objectives* and wider goals, such as the Zero Hunger Challenge, by providing evidence of progress and achievement, and pointing to improvements that can be made.
2. *They enhance the visibility of results* by bringing to light achievements on the ground, as well as revealing areas of underperformance.
3. *They help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of programming*, by providing insight into what is working, and what is not, and what lessons have been learned.

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[9] UNEG Norms for evaluation aim to facilitate collaboration on evaluation within the UN system by providing agreed-upon basic principles. They provide a reference for strengthening, professionalizing and improving the quality of evaluation in all entities of the United Nations system'. See UNEG (2005) Norms for Evaluation in the UN system. UNEG Standards are aimed at helping guide the institutional framework and management of the evaluation function, conduct and use of evaluations. Both documents are available at http://www.uneval.org/document/foundation-documents

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4. *They support the sustainability of programming,* by demonstrating to partners what has been achieved and reporting on how lessons have been learned.
5. *They support staff and management decision-making,* by generating information on progress.
6. *They help WFP learn lessons,* both within individual offices and corporately, drawing from real experience on the ground.

26. The distinct features of decentralized evaluations and reviews also highlight added value more specific to decentralized evaluations or reviews as follows:

Decentralized evaluation

- *Improving accountability:* evaluations being independently conducted and publicly available, they contribute to WFP's accountability. Decentralized evaluations are likely to be perceived by external stakeholders as a more independent way of assessing WFP's performance than reviews. At a corporate level, being able to report on the proportion of its Portfolio[10] covered by decentralized evaluations allows WFP to make a clear statement of corporate accountability to its Executive Board.
- *Enhancing WFP's credibility:* Conducted independently and according to established international standards, decentralized evaluations are perceived by donors, host governments and other partners as a credible way of assessing WFP's performance.

Reviews

- *Speed:* Reviews can be used to generate timely information quickly, to support rapid decision-making on the ground.
  Internal reflection: Reviews can provide an opportunity for staff to reflect more deeply than in regular performance monitoring on what is helping and hindering progress.

Timing: when to plan and conduct a decentralized evaluation or a review?

27. The optimal time for *deciding* to undertake a decentralized evaluation or review is at programme planning stage, in order that the decision on which to choose is made strategically, rather than in response to expediency only, such as the available budget. Making the decision in advance means that the exercise can be scheduled into workplans, and appropriate budgetary allocations made. Additionally, preparations can start early to gather relevant data – this is particularly important for some types of evaluations.[11]

28. Decentralized evaluations and reviews can also – as explained above – be conducted when a specific need arises i.e. on an *'ad hoc'* basis. In these cases, the decision between a decentralized evaluation and a review may be based partly on expediency/ feasibility. However, the different features and purposes of a decentralized evaluation or review – as set out here – should still be taken into account.

Section 3: Deciding between a decentralized evaluation and a review

29. To support flexibility, and in keeping with its highly decentralized nature and diversity of operating conditions, WFP does not provide staff with strict 'rules' on when a decentralized

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[10] Portfolio refers to all activities undertaken in a CO whatever the source of funding.
[11] Such as Impact Evaluations. For discussion on types of evaluations, see the Guidance [link].

evaluation or review is required. Mindful of the value they add to the organisation's work, however, their production and use to inform programming is encouraged.

30.   Accordingly, and beyond the coverage norms set by WFP's forthcoming Evaluation Policy, to be approved by the Executive Board in November 2015, staff have the flexibility to select between a decentralized evaluation and a review according to their particular operational circumstances, conditions and needs. This section of the Orientation Note guides staff through structuring the decision-making process.

The main factors influencing selection

31.   There is often no 'right' or 'wrong' choice between a decentralized evaluation or review. In many situations – though not all – both are possible. The selection should:

a) Take into account the *different features* of a decentralized evaluation and a review, above;
b) Reflect the *best option for the circumstance*, given the very varied operating conditions of WFP's programming;
c) Have the intention of gaining *maximum value* for the resources invested.

32.   The choice of whether to select a decentralized evaluation or review is shaped by seven key considerations ('triggers'). These concern the specific operating conditions and needs for the exercise. These seven 'triggers' are as follows:

1. **Need** – why is the exercise wanted?
2. **Coverage** – what will the exercise cover?
3. **Demand** – who wants the exercise to be carried out?
4. **Use** – who will use the evidence generated?
5. **Context** – how will context affect the exercise?
6. **Timing** – when is it needed?
7. **Duration and cost** – how long and what resourcing is available?

33.   Discussing responses to this set of questions in relation to the specific operating context will help staff to reach a decision on whether a decentralized evaluation or a review is the best fit for their particular needs and circumstances.

Structuring the decision between a decentralized evaluation or review

34.   To facilitate making a choice between evaluation and review, having considered the different features, above, the next section guides WFP staff through different triggers in a structured-decision making process.

35.   The decision should be made collectively by all relevant staff, following the process below:

1. To structure the decision making process, work through each of the 'triggers' (below); discuss and agree responses
2. With the responses assembled, consider which option– that of a decentralized evaluation or a review – is best indicated under trigger
3. With responses to all of the seven trigger categories in place, review your responses and consider whether a decentralized evaluation or review is most indicated overall.

36.   There may be conditions in which either or both of a decentralized evaluation or review are indicated. In these cases, staff should make their own decisions, guided by this Note – but should develop (and record) an explicit rationale for the choice made and the reasons for it.

Table 2: key triggers to inform selection of Decentralised Evaluations or Reviews

KEY

☐ = *Areas relevant to both a decentralized evaluation and review*

☐ = *Areas relevant to a decentralized evaluation*

☐ = *Areas relevant to a review*

Decentralized evaluation	Review
1. Need: Why do we want it?	
• To apply learning in order to improve performance. • To provide information that will help management make decisions. • To assess achievement of results and identify where adjustments are required. • To inform a budget revision • To inform project, programme, strategy design. • To assess what has worked well, what not and why (including looking at relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability) • To assess the efficiency of operational design and management.	
• To understand what benefits WFP interventions have brought to beneficiaries – particularly *medium and longer term* benefits • To test, prove, validate and extract lessons to be applied in replication, adaptation or scaling up of interventions • To assess the impact (s) of the intervention • To generate evidence for accountability to stakeholders, including donors, governments and citizens • To gain credibility with external stakeholders • To get an independent point of view	• To understand what benefits WFP interventions have brought to beneficiaries – particularly *immediate and medium term* benefits • To extract lessons for application in replication, adaptation or scaling up of interventions • To foster internal engagement

2. Coverage: What will the exercise cover?	
• Operations, activities, pilot initiatives, thematic areas, transfer modalities and any other area of institutional performance.	
	• Early action review of emergencies.

3. Demand: Who wants the exercise?	
• Country Offices, Regional Bureaus, Headquarters Divisions	
• Donors	
• Partner governments	

4. Use: Who will use the findings?	
• Country Offices, Regional Bureaus, Headquarters	
• Donors	
• Partner governments	
• National stakeholders and partners	

5. Context: How will context affect the exercise?	
• Will be publicly available or disseminated in the national context	• Can be retained as a WFP internal exercise
• Might require government awareness/acknowledgement of the exercise	• Political sensitivities may make it unfeasible to publish or disseminate

6. Timing: when do we need it?	
• Most likely toward the end of an intervention YET sufficiently in advance to ensure that they feed into the design of the next intervention or budget revision;	• During implementation (possibly mid-term);
• Can be during the intervention, particularly when there will be a significant change in context or funding	• May also be at the end of an intervention;
	• When a need arises (ad hoc);
• Any time after the intervention has ended	• When answers are needed quickly.

7. Duration and cost: How long, and what resourcing, do we have?	
• Usually longer time frames than for reviews, due to following a more rigorous approach and having an often larger scope	• Usually a shorter time frame than for decentralized evaluation, due to often having more limited coverage
• Cost may therefore be higher than for reviews	• Cost may therefore be lower than for decentralized evaluations

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