

Evaluation Brief

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



Synthesis of WFP Operation Evaluations (July 2015 - June 2016)

Context

In line with WFP's corporate emphasis on evidence and accountability for results and its ongoing organizational shift from food aid to food assistance, the Office of Evaluation (OEV) launched, in 2013, a temporary series of single Operation Evaluations (OpEv). Intended to complement OEV's 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 accountability and learning.

Subject of the Synthesis

The operations evaluations series is synthesised annually. This is the third such synthesis report, covering 15 evaluations conducted between July 2015 and June 2016, 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 Evaluation

The operations reviewed were implemented in diverse and sometimes volatile settings, from refugee camps to development contexts between 2012 and 2018. They had a total combined planned value of USD 2.6 billion and funding of USD 1.06 billion, targeting 18 million beneficiaries, and were of varying types, durations and sizes. The coverage of the OpEv evaluations by region conducted within the first three years of the series broadly reflected that of WFP operations.

Key Findings

Operation Designs

Coverage and Scale: The 15 operations were ambitious in terms of coverage of needs and scale. Five evaluations question the scale of this ambition. **Rigour of design:** Again, inconsistent evidence base for design is noted in this cohort. Weaknesses reported include shallow or incomplete analysis (especially of special needs of most vulnerable groups, including gender needs), and insufficient use of available learning or evidence, reducing quality and relevance of designs. **Appropriateness to needs:** All operations were broadly appropriate to beneficiary needs, with specific challenges at activity level linked, mostly, to the shortcoming in the evidence base noted. These related to: **objective setting** - with untested assumptions of programme design (found in eight evaluations) sometimes undermining relevance; **targeting** - whilst appropriately designed in half, it was reported as an area of improvement in two-thirds of the reports; and limited **internal synergies** - reported in nine of the 11 multi-component operations (with seven highlighting missed opportunities to make internal

connections). **Transfer modalities** were mostly appropriate, even if sometimes constrained by context.

Strategic Positioning & Intended Partnerships

As in previous syntheses, WFP's **strategic positioning** reflects the organisation's shift from *implementer* to *enabler*, now gathering pace. Designs were found to be well-aligned with national policy frameworks and objectives, with most operations moreover reflecting a pro-active strategic approach to design, implementation, or direct support to development of national policy frameworks. With **intended partnerships** becoming more strategic, political and policy challenges are recorded in a third of the reports, reported to affect design, with two evaluations specifically questioning the role taken on by WFP in country.

Capacity development intentions

Also linked to the corporate's ongoing shift from *implementer* to *enabler*, **capacity development intentions** feature in 12 of the cohort's operations, with nine geared to disaster risk management and/or resilience, and three to school-feeding programmes. However, intentions are faced with important shortcomings in designs, such as non comprehensive diagnostic, unclear implementation strategy, objectives, targets and/or results.

Results

Data availability continues to improve, with monitoring systems praised in six evaluations. **Data quality concerns**, especially at outcome level, persist, such as internal discrepancies, or lack of robust baselines, and this year's cohort features **data management and analysis (and use)** challenges.

Output level - Beneficiary numbers and quantities of food, cash and vouchers distributed are the main output-level results reported. As for previous syntheses, the evaluations indicate that the targeted beneficiaries were served with less food (52% of target), and less cash (47%) than planned. All operations faced either reduced duration, frequency, or entitlements of assistance, sometimes for several months. Reasons include limited **national capacities**, reported in all; inadequate **funding levels** (two-thirds of the evaluations), as well as; **contextual factors**, such as natural disasters or conflict (over half). Unpredictability of funding was less of a reported concern (featuring only in five). **General distributions (GD):** Implemented in just under half of the operations, GD activities, using a variety of modalities, reached over 3 million people annually or 63% of planned beneficiaries for the period under review, with wide variation between years due to lower caseloads than anticipated, operational constraints or insufficient funding. **School feeding:** school feeding reached 85% of target beneficiaries (over 1.8 million per year), with 12 operations including this activity. **Nutrition:** nutrition activities reached between 1.6 and 1.8 million beneficiaries per year,

through 11 operations, achieving the highest target against plan (89%) of all activities. **FFA**: with some 240,000 beneficiaries reached per year, targets achieved were relatively low (49%), primarily owing to funding constraints. **Cash-based transfers** were used in half of the operations, with some USD 57 million disbursed in 2014-2015, corresponding to 47% percent of planned amounts, showing wide variations across operations. Many positive effects were recorded, from reduced entitlements' sale, to enhanced dignity and empowerment, namely of women, and market stimuli.

Outcome level – More readily available than in previous syntheses, with **data quality** remaining a challenge, outcome data was also constrained by the mid-term nature of the evaluations (11 of the operations under review). The cohort's performance broadly reflects the achievements of the corporate-wide performance reported in the 2015 Annual Performance Report. WFP's traditional areas of strength, Strategic Objectives 1 (saving lives and protect livelihoods) and 2 (support or restore food and nutrition security and rebuild livelihoods) show consistent available evidence and strong achievements. Strategic Objectives 3 (reduce risk and enable people, communities and countries to meeting food and nutrition needs) and 4 (reduce undernutrition) see weaker evidence availability and/or more variable performance. **Under-reporting** is less an issue as in previous syntheses, but some results remain **under-represented** (not captured by corporate systems), with evaluations uncovering significant contributions to Sustainable Development Goals and Zero Hunger Challenge, such as strengthened economic activity, increased and/or diversified agricultural production, increased household incomes / access to health services / resilience through climate change measures, or stabilised food prices.

Gender, protection and accountability to affected populations: these areas show mixed results. All but one evaluation referenced **gender**, however the limited gender sensitivity reported in previous syntheses continues with only three evaluations finding operation implementation geared to intended qualitative and quantitative gender results. Six operations adopted a quantitative approach to gender; two were gender-blind, and; three others intensified their gender focus throughout implementation (although gaps remained). Limitations in the corporate performance indicators for gender are noted in a third evaluations of this cohort, with **transformational changes** noted in a third more, including modified division of labour, or changes in attitudes. The risks of gender-insensitive context analysis were reflected in three operations, with unintended effects of interventions reported.

Ten evaluations report on **protection** and/or **accountability to affected population** - seven on protection, and five finding close engagement with communities for planning and implementation, communications on entitlements, and/or complaints mechanisms established.

Building enabling environments: This cohort records continued progress beyond immediate results for beneficiary towards valuable **contributions to national policy and accountability environments** in various sectors, such as education, social protection, nutrition and disaster preparedness and risk reduction. Significant **capacity gains** are also registered (in preparedness, food security, disaster management, resilience, supply-chain), although mostly

focused on individual units or departments, rather than at systemic level, and despite technical design weaknesses and a narrow definition of capacity-development as 'training'. **Sustainability and hand-over** have consistently been assessed as weak by the series' syntheses, including this third one, with only four operations (on 14 eligible) showing positive progress. Six evaluations in this cohort also emphasise the need for WFP to adequately prepare for departure. The positive pattern of strong **partnerships** with governments during implementation highlighted in previous synthesis continues, as the inconsistent pattern of WFP's relationships with partner UN agencies, with missed opportunities highlighted in ten evaluations. WFP continues to increasingly take, where conditions permit, enabling roles, as food security advocate, knowledge broker, information supplier, as well as innovator and pilot tester, namely in disaster risk reduction. Agile and flexible partnerships are again commended, and cost-efficiency of partnerships positively featured, in six evaluations.

Explanatory Factors

Factors explaining results are both *external* (context and operational terrain, political and policy challenges, insufficient funding in terms of volumes or type/duration), and *internal* (limited human resources in terms of technical capacity, or numbers; weak internal communications; and design flaws linked to limited use of – and learning from – available evidence; limited gender sensitivity and shallow analysis, and; targeting weaknesses). Enabling factors include conducive policy environments, strong technical back-stopping by regional bureaux of small country offices and WFP credibility with government partners, arising from WFP's trusted (enduring) relationships with governments and transparent communications which support partnerships.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Overall, this third synthesis finds WFP's adoption of an enabling (rather than purely delivery) model successfully helping build nationally owned food and nutrition systems, where conditions permit. The findings of these evaluations suggest that WFP's comparative advantages – its confidence, agility and willingness to innovate alongside its resolute commitment to those it serves – continue to be reflected in this cohort. While positioning it well, WFP's assets and capacities require firmer harnessing to safeguard future results in the era of Sustainable Development Goals, as the evidence finds that WFP's swift operational adaptation has outpaced some of its technical capacities. Design continues to lack rigour (including a sufficient evidence-base and detailed logic chains). Capacity development lacks clear diagnostics or strategy, with activities piecemeal rather than systemic. Committed alliances with government supported results, but partnerships are not yet fully inclusive. Planning for sustainability and handover remains insufficient.

Lessons learned

Six lessons were identified to support WFP and pertain to: rigour in programme desing; learning and use from available evidence; sharpening capacity-development guidance; moving beyond numbers in matters of gender; comprehensive partnerships; preparing for sustainable hand-over.

Reference:

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