

Technical Note

Thematic Evaluation

Version September 2017

1. Introduction

1. The purpose of this TN is to clarify the specificities of a thematic evaluation noting that the DEQAS Process Guide is the main reference to describe key characteristics common to all evaluations. This note only includes information specific to THEMATIC evaluations.

Key characteristics of a thematic evaluation

Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Relevance, results, and factors affecting results of WFP interventions in cross-cutting thematic areas such as partnerships, gender, etc. (see box 1)
Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All or selected interventions which are relevant to the thematic area under evaluation, covering the period of implementation in a defined geographical area• A thematic area can usually be considered at a range of spatial levels, such as multi-country, a country or a specific area within a country. It can also be considered within one Operation or across a number of Operations.

2. What is a thematic evaluation?

2. A thematic area cuts across humanitarian and/or development interventions. Examples of thematic areas relevant to WFP include:

Box 1: Thematic Areas relevant to decentralized evaluation

- Gender
- Partnerships
- Protection
- Environment/Climate Change
- Capacity strengthening*
- HIV and AIDS*
- Resilience building/disaster risk reduction*
- Innovation

**Resilience, HIV and AIDS and Capacity Strengthening can be both types of activities and thematic areas which may be mainstreamed across or integrated into other intervention types.*

Accountability to affected populations, protection and gender are the key identified cross-cutting themes in the WFP Corporate Results Framework. Interventions, such as capacity strengthening, resilience-building, disaster risk reduction and HIV/AIDS, while amenable to programming as areas of intervention may also lend themselves to evaluation as thematic areas. However, since the evaluation of these interventions can be addressed under other types of decentralized evaluations, such as [Activity](#), [Operation](#) or [Pilot](#), this Technical Note concentrates on the evaluation of the cross-cutting themes/approaches, and their mainstreaming across interventions.

3. A thematic area can usually be considered at a range of spatial levels, such as global, multi-country, country or sub-country (specific area within a country). It can also be considered within a country strategic plan (CSP), an operation, an activity or across a number of CSPs, operations or activities.

3. When should a thematic evaluation be conducted?

4. In terms of planning, it is particularly important **that each intervention that seeks to address the selected theme** integrates elements that will make it possible to cover it under a thematic evaluation. This includes identifying the theme as an important aspect of the intervention (e.g. capacity strengthening within nutrition, school feeding etc) and the flexibility of either evaluating these as part of a thematic evaluation by considering the wider country portfolio and the approach of other interventions in regard to the theme.
5. To ensure a coherent approach in this regard requires elevating the discussions above individual interventions and using the annual performance planning and review processes to take a broader view of the evaluable themes.

4. What criteria and questions should be applied for thematic evaluations?

6. The DEQAS [Technical Note on Evaluation Criteria and Questions](#) provides the definitions of the evaluation criteria, and explains how they should be selected and applied.
7. For thematic evaluations the questions will usually focus on **the extent to which the theme has been mainstreamed across or integrated into the interventions, and the effects of the mainstreaming/integration**. More examples of questions for thematic evaluations are available in table 1.

Table 1: Example Evaluation Questions for Thematic Evaluations

Criteria	Questions
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent did the approach/design of the mainstreaming/integration provide a consistent set of overall objectives to help meet the needs of target groups? • To what extent did the approach/design of the mainstreaming support the objectives of relevant interventions to help meet the needs of target groups? • To what extent has WFP’s approach to mainstreaming/integrating the theme been appropriately differentiated e.g. by intervention, location, institutional context etc?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did the realization of the intended objectives of the mainstreaming/integration of the theme vary by approach and location? Where was mainstreaming/integration of the theme most successful, where least and why? • To what extent did the mainstreaming/integration of the theme deliver ‘more than the sum of the parts’ across a set of interventions (if applicable)?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What contribution did mainstreaming/integrating the theme/approach make to helping WFP deliver institutional changes and/or changes in beneficiaries' lives, in the medium to longer term? • Did these contributions vary according to the type of intervention or location or institution?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which approaches to mainstreaming/integrating the theme were more or less cost-efficient? • Were efficiencies in mainstreaming/integrating the theme sought across interventions within the thematic area?
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did the design and implementation of the approach to mainstreaming/integrating the theme incorporate sustainability measures, such as capacity building of government (national and local), communities and other partners? • Were these sustainability measures implemented comprehensively in the component interventions across the thematic area, and in a consistent way?

5. Data and approaches for a thematic evaluation

- For thematic evaluations, standard monitoring may not provide all the relevant data to enable the theme to be evaluated. Instead, thematic evaluations will require drawing on and compiling a large range of data sources and information, to ensure adequate coverage of a thematic area.
- In thematic evaluations that cover multiple interventions, there will not **be a logical framework available to draw upon**. Therefore, the evaluation will require that **a new logical framework (ex-post)** or other analytical framework be constructed for the thematic area, in order that assessment can take place against it (see [Technical Note on Using Logical Models](#)).
- Theories of change can also be useful devise for identifying the expected strategic outcomes, causal pathways and assumptions implied by the set of interventions/approaches considered in the scope of such an evaluation. This will require review of intervention(s) design documentation, and discussion with staff and partners involved in design and implementation.
- The process of developing a theory of change (see [WFP Guidance on Developing Theories of Change](#)) for a thematic area helps evaluators and stakeholders describe the thematic strategy or programme intent more clearly, agree on key terms and assumptions, and confirm expected outcomes and impacts. The process will generally require an experienced evaluator facilitating one or more guided conversations with stakeholders to help construct the logic model from design documentation. This will happen during the inception phase.
- To ensure that evaluations meet quality standards, WFP recommends that a combination of **mixed methods** be applied. This includes qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis. The DEQAS [Technical Note on Methodology in Decentralized Evaluation](#) provides more detail on individual methods and how they can be combined.

For more information on Decentralized Evaluations visit our webpage

<http://newgo.wfp.org/how-do-i-do-an-evaluation>

Or contact the DE team at: wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org