

Evaluation Quality Assurance System (EQAS)

Impact Evaluation Decision Guide

This guide aims to provide transparency to WFP and its partners on how OEV determines whether a proposed evaluation fits with the definition for impact evaluation in the WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy and is relevant and feasible. To make sure that all opportunities for impact evaluation are given due consideration, OEV encourages Country Offices, Regional Bureaux and Head Quarter Divisions to discuss any interests in conducting impact evaluations with the OEV Impact Evaluation Team.

1

What is an impact evaluation?

2

Roles and responsibilities

3

Is impact evaluation relevant and useful for your learning needs

4

Is an impact evaluation feasible in the context of your intervention?

5

What information should be on hand when contacting the OEV Impact Evaluation Team to help review the above requirements?

1. What is an impact evaluation?

According to [WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy](#), impact evaluations measure changes in development outcomes of interest for a target population that can be attributed to a specific programme or a policy through a credible counterfactual. The term “impact” is understood as short-term or long-term “changes and effects” caused directly by the programme or policy, which can be positive or negative, direct or indirect, intended or unintended. The impact of the programme should not be confused with impact indicators in a results chain. Impact evaluations are useful in answering cause-and-effect questions to understand whether interventions have had a net effect on key outcomes in target populations, and to assess the extent of this effect and how it came about.

Impact evaluations are useful to demonstrate the direct effects of an intervention to support decision making, particularly to:

- Assess innovative programmes
- Inform strategic decisions on whether to scale up innovations and pilots
- Test whether a programme is replicable in a new context
- Test causal pathways and delivery mechanisms

Experimental impact evaluation designs are usually the easiest and best option in WFP contexts. Experimental methods involve the random assignment of participants (individuals, households, or villages, etc.) to treatment and control groups, or to different comparison groups if creating a control group is not feasible and ethical. This is also the most robust and credible approach for impact evaluation, because it removes all selection bias (difference created when selecting people based on any observable or unobservable characteristics). Common non-experimental methods such as difference-in-difference analysis require trend data (e.g. timeseries or panel data) from before interventions to create credible comparison groups.

Due to methodological and budgetary constraints, impact evaluations usually cover only a limited set of interventions at a time, and attempt to answer only a limited, carefully selected set of questions. A significant amount of time and effort is usually required to arrive at the best impact evaluation design for a particular programme.

2. Roles and responsibilities

All WFP impact evaluations are managed directly by OEV and its technical partners¹ in close consultation and collaboration with the country office involved in implementing the programme.

Regional bureaux (REOs and programme advisers) are important sources of advice and support during the selection, management and delivery of impact evaluations.

Impact evaluations are primarily delivered through thematic impact evaluation windows developed in partnership with WFP programme teams. The aim of these windows is to stimulate and shape demand for impact evaluations in priority areas and enable the Office of Evaluation to prepare cross-regional portfolios that allow for the kinds of evidence syntheses that meet WFP's global evidence needs.² OEV gives priority to impact evaluations that fit within the thematic impact evaluation windows and funds the technical assistance portion of these evaluations. OEV announces calls for expressions of interest to WFP country offices about once a year for each thematic window, but accepts new proposals with a particularly high relevance to a window outside the formal calls for expression of interest. The likelihood of OEV taking on an impact evaluation is higher if its evaluation questions are relevant to one of the thematic windows.

On an exceptional basis, OEV or its technical partners can manage a small number of "priority" impact evaluations per year outside the thematic windows, if these are of particular corporate interest to WFP globally. Normally, the CO or donor will be expected to fully fund the evaluation.

Though impact evaluations are centrally managed, country offices are expected to be closely involved in impact evaluation design, responsible for assuring correct implementation of the intervention, and to provide co-financing and logistical support to data collection.

OEV's Impact Evaluation Team will support planning and budgeting and should be consulted along with the REOs before any formal commitment is made to commission an IE in the CSP document or funding proposals.

3. Is impact evaluation relevant and useful for your learning needs

WFP uses impact evaluations as a tool for learning and evidence generation. An impact evaluation is usually more expensive, time demanding, and complex to manage than other types of evaluation. OEV therefore only recommends an impact evaluation if the benefits expected from learning are likely to outweigh the investment and prioritizes those impact evaluations that support key programme decisions and make a significant contribution to global evidence and corporate learning.

When a country office is interested in doing an impact evaluation, the Programme and M&E teams should first carefully consider the purpose of their evaluation and related questions. An impact evaluation can provide credible answers to the following types of questions:

¹ Currently, OEV's sole technical partner for impact evaluation is the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation Unit (DIME). In future, OEV intends to expand its technical partnerships to other competent institutions as needed to meet demand.

² See [Technical Note on Planning and Budgeting for Evaluations](#).

- Is an intervention package effective in the context in which it is implemented, i.e. can we claim without a doubt that this package has significantly changed one or more outcomes of interest for the target population?
- Do the different components of an intervention package work best together or separately or in a particular sequence, and which components have the biggest effect on outcomes in this particular context?
- If more than one intervention approach is being considered to achieve similar effects, which approach is the most effective in this context? Or, which approach is most cost-effective?
- What are the underlying mechanisms or change processes that explain why an intervention package (or its individual components) leads to certain effects?

These example questions illustrate the core of understanding the cause and effect relationship between interventions and measured changes.

Many other questions can already be answered through existing approaches by reviews or activity evaluations, and do not require an impact evaluation. For example, questions such as: Was the intervention relevant to needs? Was targeting relevant and successful³? Was it implemented right? How many people were assisted and what assistance did each target group receive? Was assistance delivered in a timely and cost-efficient manner? Are outcome and impact indicators improving for different categories of WFP beneficiaries (without needing to know what exactly WFP's contribution has been to this improvement)?

Impact evaluations, on the other hand, answer questions about the *causal effect* of a programme or its components on outcomes of interest. Some example questions from ongoing IEs in WFP are:

- How does access to cash-based transfers, and shifting the role a woman plays in a programme's asset-building activities, impact her economic empowerment?
- What is the impact of a food-for-assets training in rural communities on out-migration to cities?
- Do livelihood activities help communities or households increase their income (in addition to the cash paid), or diversify their income source?
- How can we time the livelihood activities and cash transfers to maximize the benefit for communities?

4. Is an impact evaluation feasible in the context of your intervention?

Once it has been determined that an impact evaluation is appropriate to meet WFP's learning needs, the following dimensions will be considered to assess feasibility of the evaluation:

1. What is the status of the intervention you want to assess with an impact evaluation?

- **The intervention is currently being designed.** This is the ideal scenario, as it allows for integrating the impact evaluation into intervention design. This opens the possibility for an experimental impact evaluation with randomized sampling of the treatment and control groups – the most robust approach for impact evaluation.
- **The intervention is ongoing but expanding to new intervention areas.** In this case, it might still be possible to conduct an experimental impact evaluation.
- **The intervention is ongoing and not expanding.** In this case, a quasi-experimental impact evaluation might still be possible. However, these usually have much higher data requirements- both data from before and during the intervention. In some cases, data on both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries will be needed. *Please contact the OEV Impact Evaluation Team to discuss design options.*

³ Note that some key questions on targeting can be examined using an impact evaluation. For instance, what would be the optimal percentage of households in a community who should receive assistance, for the resilience of that community to improve, i.e. should we support 30% of the most vulnerable in 10 communities as opposed to 100% of households in 3 communities?

2. **How much time is available before programme interventions start?** Conceptualising and designing the impact evaluation, obtaining ethical clearances, hiring the field coordinator and data collection team, assigning the beneficiary and control groups, and collecting baseline data from both groups, all need to be carried out before the intervention can start providing assistance in the locations included in the impact evaluation design. It usually requires at least 6 months to go through those steps.
3. **Is funding available for additional data collection?** Data collection costs vary widely depending on country context, impact evaluation questions and the number and size of surveys to be conducted. Usually, the Country Office must bear these costs. In some cases, a donor may explicitly request an impact evaluation and ask for it to be included in the project budget. A small contingency fund has been set aside by OEV to co-fund data collection in exceptional cases. *Please contact the OEV Impact Evaluation Team for guidance on data costs.*
4. **Is there sufficient buy-in from key stakeholders?** Given the significant time and effort required, it is important to also ascertain whether the government, donors and other key implementing partners are truly interested. Stakeholder buy-in is critical *during* the evaluation and also *after* the evaluation, to make sure impact evaluation results are used for policy decision making.
5. **How much control does WFP have over programme implementation?** Once agreed, the impact evaluation design should be adhered to for at least one intervention cycle, sometimes longer, to measure the impact of a programme. Any changes made in terms of targeting, timing or assistance can make it difficult to identify the impact of a programme on the outcomes of interest. This makes it very important that WFP and the implementing partners are all committed to the impact evaluation before it starts. OEV is developing impact evaluation designs and approaches for less predictable humanitarian and fragile contexts, the reality for a large percentage of WFP operations.

5. What information should be on hand when contacting the OEV Impact Evaluation Team to help review the above requirements?

When contacting the OEV Impact Evaluation Team, please have the following information on hand:

A broad idea of the questions the CO is interested in answering

Total budget for the evaluation

Relevant dates, including expected dates of:

- programme design and/or funding proposal completion
- targeting exercise
- baseline data collection,
- programme planning & implementation, and
- endline data collection

Information on target population and geography, such as:

- number and location of communities (Maps are helpful!)
- number of beneficiaries per community, and
- eligibility criteria for receiving WFP support

After the call, OEV will follow up with an email to either request additional information to further assess feasibility of an impact evaluation or suggest a more appropriate evaluation or study type. Your Regional Evaluation Officer is also available to support selecting the most appropriate type of evaluation for your programme.

For more information on evaluations visit our webpage <http://newgo.wfp.org/how-do-i/do-an-evaluation>

For decentralized evaluations, contact the DE team at: wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org