

Technical Note

Quality of Evaluation Recommendations

1. Purpose and Audience

1. Recommendations are the most direct means by which the evaluation influences the future work of WFP and are often the most-read part of evaluation reports. As such, they are closely linked to the evaluation principle of utility. When/if implemented, they are expected to contribute to strengthened performance of WFP programmes, strategies, or policies. Recommendations should suit the needs of the organization and be relevant to the context within which they are made.
2. Within the WFP evaluation normative framework, WFP management can agree, partially agree or disagree with a recommendation. A 2022 independent review of [implementation of recommendations](#) found that recommendations were not fully agreed to or rejected because they:¹
 - a. contradicted WFP policies
 - b. did not sufficiently consider financial and human resource constraints
 - c. went too far in the 'how' of addressing a specific issue
 - d. were not suited to the pragmatic nature of the organization
3. The purpose of this note is to set out WFP's standards and expectations for the quality of recommendations in evaluation reports. It aims to provide a succinct overview of standards to evaluators as well as WFP staff involved in reviewing, quality assuring and providing feedback on draft evaluation reports. Evaluators should refer to this note to know what WFP expects and staff should use it to know what to look for when reviewing draft reports. When providing feedback to evaluators, staff should, where appropriate refer to the specific standard that may be missing in the way recommendations are framed so that evaluators can respond. WFP will not approve evaluation reports with recommendations that do not meet these standards.

2. Concepts and Definitions

4. Following the evaluation findings, the conclusions reflect their implications (so what). The recommendations build directly on the conclusions and are proposals advanced by evaluators to respond to or address one or more evaluation conclusions. WFP defines an evaluation recommendation as "a proposed course of action aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, relevance, sustainability, appropriateness, connectedness, coherence or coverage of a WFP intervention, *programme, portfolio, area of work, strategy or policy. Recommendations are intended to inform WFP's decision-making, including programme design, implementation, and resource allocation*"².
5. Well-formulated recommendations are more likely to optimize the utility of evaluations. In WFP, recommendations are an integral component of evaluation reports and can stimulate learning and lead to improvements by feeding into strategic and operational decision-making³.

¹ Page 7, paragraph 12 of the review report

² <http://go.wfp.org/web/evaluation/glossary>.

³ In WFP, utility does not only hinge upon evaluations recommendations.

3. Standards for Quality Evaluation Recommendations

6. There are three main aspects that influence quality of recommendation, their use and impact.⁴ These are:
 1. the **process** of formulating recommendations – how and who is involved?
 2. the **content** of recommendations – what is being recommended and why?
 3. the **structure** and organization of recommendations – how are the recommendations stated?
7. These three areas are based on guidance from the United Nations Evaluation Group ([UNEG Checklist on Quality of Evaluation Recommendations](#)) which have been adapted for WFP context. These standards ensure that recommendations are of an appropriate quality and are structured in a way that progress in their implementation can be tracked through WFP’s corporate Risk and Recommendation System (R2). This is in line with [UNEG good practice guidelines for follow up to evaluations](#).
8. Whilst the primary responsibility of formulating recommendations lies with the evaluators, evaluation managers (EMs) have the responsibility to ensure recommendations meet required standards through quality assurance. While implementation and follow-up of the recommendation actions is a management responsibility, it is the role of the evaluation function to continuously reflect on the utilisation of recommendations into action, in order improve the formulation of recommendation action and related processes.

3.1. Standards for Process of formulating recommendations

9. Formulation of recommendations does not start at the end of an evaluation. Certain actions taken throughout the evaluation process starting with Terms of reference preparation. When the EM identifies potential evaluation users in the TOR, this sets the stage for engaging them throughout the evaluation process and especially in the formulation of the recommendations. When stakeholders review draft reports, they check whether recommendations are informed by and consistent with findings and conclusions.
10. When stakeholders attend learning workshops for each evaluation, they discuss and validate recommendations and sub-recommendations, with the understanding that ultimately the evaluation team has the final say on their contents based on the findings and conclusions. While stakeholder learning workshops are a standard step for centralised evaluations, this is a good practise encouraged also for decentralised evaluations.
11. Table 1 summarizes the main criteria that the evaluation teams and WFP should apply in the process of formulating recommendations to ensure they are clear, targeted to the relevant audience, actionable and feasible within the timelines proposed. Whether a standard is mandatory or desired is guided by the UNEG checklist referenced earlier.

Table 1. Process of formulating recommendations

	Criteria - What to do	Mandatory/ Desirable	Who makes sure it happens ⁵	Phase
1	Identify evaluation users in Terms of Reference, their evidence needs and potential uses.	Mandatory	Evaluation Manager	Preparation
2	Clarify and elaborate how evaluation results will be utilised and by whom in the IR	Desirable	Evaluation team	Inception Report
3	During interviews and focus group discussions, encourage stakeholders to suggest what should be continued (or not) or scaled-up/down and what could be done to overcome problems and weaknesses.	Desirable	Evaluation Team	Data Collection
4	Create opportunities for intended users and other stakeholders to help conceptualize, refine, and co-produce the recommendation. The includes learning workshops held	Mandatory	Evaluation Team	Analysis and Reporting

⁴ <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/2124>

⁵ The details of the specific roles of stakeholders for each of these elements as per evaluation phases are presented in the respective EQAS

	Criteria - What to do	Mandatory/Desirable	Who makes sure it happens ⁵	Phase
	towards the end of the reporting phase and other stakeholder debriefings. substantial time should be dedicated to discussing and refining the recommendations whenever feasible		Evaluation Manager	
5	Ask intended users and other reference group members to provide comments on the draft recommendations. When sharing the draft report with stakeholders, remind them to focus on answering the questions “How useful are the recommendations?”, “How feasible are the recommendations”, “Are the recommendations consistent with findings and conclusions”?	Mandatory	Evaluation Manager	Analysis and Reporting
6	Encourage intended and potential users to start reflecting on the management response while commenting on the draft recommendations as this allows to confirm whether the recommendations are sufficiently clear, actionable, feasible within the timelines proposed etc.	Desirable	Evaluation Manager	Analysis and Reporting
7	When finalising and prioritising the recommendations, consider multiple stakeholders’ perspectives gathered throughout the process including those of marginalized groups (such as persons with disabilities, women, the elderly, minorities, youth, etc.), where appropriate ⁶ as well as those that will be responsible for implementing the actions being recommended	Desirable	Evaluation Team	Data Collection

3.2. Standards for Recommendation structure and organization

12. The way in which recommendations are structured and organized helps evaluation users better understand their intent, nature, level of priority as well as how to address them. Table 3 displays quality criteria that ensure an adequate structure and organization of recommendations.

Table 2. Recommendation structure and organization

	Criteria - Recommendations should...	Mandatory/Desirable
1	...consist of short paragraphs.	Mandatory
2	...be limited to six recommendations (with sub-recommendations if/where necessary). Evaluation teams should prioritise what to recommend based on the conclusions	Mandatory
3	...have actions either against the overall recommendation or sub-recommendation but not both levels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the recommendation is primarily about one main action, it should be one overall recommendation without sub-recommendations, with actions clearly stated • If the recommendation entails several different elements, define an overall recommendation and sub-recommendations where the overarching recommendation is a summary of the sub-recommendations and does not require any action other than those needed to address the different sub-recommendations. Collectively, the sub-recommendations should encompass all the elements presented in the overall 	Mandatory

⁶Disability Inclusion guidance: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000145794/download/>; Gender integration guidance: <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000002691/download/>

	Criteria – Recommendations should...	Mandatory/ Desirable
	recommendation, as the actions in the management response will only be included for sub-recommendations and not the main statement of the recommendation	
4	...be grouped/sequenced based on criteria such as the themes they address, whether they are strategic/operational, and whether they are of a short-, medium- or long-term nature.	Mandatory
5	...be prioritized in accordance with their importance (high, medium, low priority) while bearing in mind logical sequencing of the recommended actions	Mandatory
6	...be numbered (Recommendation 1, 2, 3, etc.) with sub numbers for sub-recommendations	Mandatory

13. Annex 2 provides a template for the recommended structure of recommendations in evaluation reports and summary evaluation reports.

3.3 Standards for Recommendations contents

14. The content of a recommendation is second determinant of the quality and is likely to influence use and impact of evaluation recommendations on WFP's work. When reviewing draft reports, evaluation managers and other stakeholders should look for whether recommendations meet quality standards outlined in the WFP EQAS.
15. Table 3 shows quality standards and criteria that ensure quality of recommendations contents. Where appropriate, some examples are provided from Post Hoc Quality Assessment (PHQA) report review feedback. These examples are from reports in which recommendations were rated 'partially satisfactory' (45%-59%) or unsatisfactory (below 45%).⁷

⁷ PHQA reviewers provide a quantitative rating for recommendations (1 to 4) and qualitative comments to explain the rating. The examples are taken from a review of the qualitative comments. In future updates to the note examples of good recommendations from reports where recommendations are rated highly satisfactory will be added.

Table 3. Standards for Recommendation contents

	Criteria/Standard: A Recommendations should	Mandatory/Desirable	How to tell when criteria is not met [With examples from PHQA reports and/or draft reports]
1	... be clearly and logically derived from the analysis/findings and conclusions and does not introduce concepts or evidence not presented in the findings and conclusions. ⁸	Mandatory	If you read a recommendation and you wonder ‘where did this come from?’ Example: “... WFP ... <i>should focus on principles and ways of working for a whole-of-government approach that leverages whole-of-CSP capacity...</i> ”. The concepts of whole of government and whole-of-CSP were not discussed in the findings and conclusions ⁹
2	be relevant , well aligned to the purpose and objectives of the evaluation and pitched at the right level	Mandatory	A recommendation is based on a minor/side issue not central to the purpose of the evaluation and/or of the subject of evaluation or it is informed by a minor finding in the report. In a strategic evaluation the recommendations are expected to focus on what needs to be continued, changed, resolved at a strategic level while in activity evaluations the expectation is more at operational. Example: <i>an evaluation made recommendations around “In-service teacher training” which was clearly not specific component of the school feeding programme being evaluated</i>
3a	...take into consideration policy, strategic and programmatic contexts, and WFP’s mandate	Mandatory	A recommendation includes actions that are clearly outside of WFP mandate. Example: “... <i>Build classrooms in supported schools through government funds, strategic partnerships with donors and agencies and enlisting the support and contribution of communities</i> ” ¹⁰ . Building classrooms using national funds is not something WFP has control of, though it can influence in contexts where focus is on country capacity strengthening
3b	...take into consideration human and financial resourcing situations in WFP [and partners where appropriate] as well as competing priorities while also considering how/where recommendations may be made to mobilize additional resources to implement important strategic issues.	Mandatory	Example: “A recommendation that assumes same amounts of funding will flow to the evaluated programme, when donors are known to have turned to other priorities”
3	... prioritize critical areas . Having a smaller set of the most important recommendations based on critical conclusions might increase the likelihood of follow-up.	Mandatory	Findings and conclusions are clear on specific areas needing significant improvement but there is no recommendation. Example: The evaluation concludes there was “... <i>insufficient participation of beneficiaries...limited focus on climate change...</i> ” but these issues are not reflected in any recommendations ¹¹

⁸ See annex 1 how to link findings/conclusions that can support the Team Leader and Evaluation Manager in assessing the quality of the recommendations.

⁹ 2022 Philippines DE <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000143655/download/>

¹⁰ Recommendation 1 of the Malawi 2019 school feeding evaluation <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108134/download/>

¹¹ Evaluation of Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the SDGs in the Eastern Caribbean’ [WFP Joint Programme Evaluation - Draft Evaluation Report May 2022](#)

	Criteria/Standard: A Recommendations should	Mandatory/Desirable	How to tell when criteria is not met [With examples from PHQA reports and/or draft reports]
4	...be internally consistent and take into account interdependencies between proposed/ recommended actions.	Desirable	If a recommended action contradicts/undermines/counters another recommended action Example: Within the same recommendation, ¹² recommends to “ <i>Lessen the burden of data collection on M&E staff and local level actors by streamlining indicators</i> ” in one place and “ <i>Monitor gender and protection indicators through regular gender /protection and qualitative assessments</i> ”. Because the rationale is not explained, it might sound like the system needs more indicators for the proposed additional assessments yet also the need to lessen the burden
5	...be constructive [in the language and intent of the recommendation]	Mandatory	When it is not clear how implementing the recommendation would lead to positive/ progressive change or when the language is explicitly negative/destructive/counter productive
7	... be concise, precise, and unambiguous	Mandatory	A recommendation is long winded, restates findings or it is a general statement with no action Example: “ <i>Improve the definition of change pathways across the CSP</i> ” ¹³
8	...be sufficiently specific to be actionable and provide a clear direction of intended change, indicating what is needed to achieve the change: policy, strategy, systems, training, etc.	Mandatory	When a recommendation is ‘conceptual’ rather than actionable unless it is about clarifying concepts related to WFP’s work. Example: “ <i>Offer guidance to staff to encourage them to learn and practice the right reflexes based on a better understanding of the social dynamics specific to each community, on better knowledge of the risks of dependency and how to reduce them, and on an awareness of the dynamic created by wearing the WFP logo</i> ” ¹⁴
9	... leave room for fine-tuning by to implementers and users the implementation approach while remaining balanced and impartial.	Mandatory	When a recommendation is too specific/prescriptive of how the recommendation is to be implemented or related to very detailed level of implementation actions Example: “ <i>Government should ring-fence a school feeding line item in the MoEST or National Social Security Programme (NSSP) annual budget</i> ” ¹⁵ Example: “ <i>...facilitate access to similar services for people who do not have the required hardware or user-understanding...</i> ” ¹⁶
10	...use appropriate active language , using words like should or must express advisability or necessity while using words like ‘may be’ may signal not being sure of what is being recommended	Desirable	When a recommendation uses words like “may be” and does not explain why it is not certain

¹² Recommendation 9 of the Malawi 2019 school feeding evaluation <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108134/download/>

¹³ [Tanzania Country Strategic Plan \(2022–2027\) | WFPgo](#)

¹⁴ [Madagascar Country Strategic Plan \(2019–2024\) | WFPgo](#)

¹⁵ Recommendation 4 of the Malawi 2019 school feeding evaluation <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108134/download/>

¹⁶ Recommendation 6.2 Evaluation of Enhancing Resilience and Acceleration of the SDGs in the Eastern Caribbean’ [WFP Joint Programme Evaluation - Draft Evaluation Report May 2022](#)

	Criteria/Standard: A Recommendations should	Mandatory/Desirable	How to tell when criteria is not met [With examples from PHQA reports and/or draft reports]
11	...focus on what action WFP can take, rather than those actions hoped for from/by external stakeholders . If a recommendation is the responsibility of an external stakeholder, it should be formulated as follows: “[WFP entity] should advocate or follow up for [required change] with [external stakeholders name]”. For Joint Evaluations, recommendations should be targeted to one or all of commissioning entities	Mandatory	When a recommendation places responsibility on WFP instead of external actors Example: “Build classrooms in supported schools through government funds, strategic partnerships with donors and agencies and enlisting the support and contribution of communities”
12	...orient towards actions that are likely to deliver benefits in proportion to their costs (i.e., providing value for money and/or costs can be justifiable or overall cost implications have been considered or can be considered).	Desirable	When an evaluation recommends an action that would be too expensive compared to the value and/or sustainability and/or alternatives
13	...prioritise on what WFP can do better/improve or differently (change of direction) rather than on what WFP should continue to do (confirmation of actions already taken) without any qualifications/rationale as to why status quo continuation is recommended.	Desirable	When a recommendation states what is already being done without any indication of anything different Example: “Continue to prioritize stocks for remote schools with inaccessible roads and deliver them in advance”. If this is already happening, adds no value to recommend continuing ¹⁷
14	...where appropriate, reflect a gender analysis and include relevant priorities for action to improve the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE)-related elements of the evaluand. ¹⁸	Mandatory	When there are findings and conclusions related to boys, girls, men and women benefiting (or not) and/or affected differently by the interventions in significant ways yet there is no recommendation on how to address this dimension
15	...where appropriate, include relevant priorities for actions to improve the equity-focus of the evaluand for the benefit of the most marginalized groups (such as persons with disabilities, women, the elderly, minorities, etc.).	Mandatory	estratégica y operativa: Visibilizar y generar los ajustes razonables para disminuir las barreras de acceso de la población con discapacidad (PcD) en proyectos de PSRE o Protección Social ¹⁹ (<i>Make visible and generate reasonable adjustments to reduce the barriers to access of the population with disabilities (PWD) in PSRE or Social Protection projects</i>)
16	...have been subject to do-no-harm and risk analysis.	Mandatory	When taking recommended actions is likely to go counter ‘do no harm’ principles
17	...identify who should take action for each recommendation. In case the recommendation/sub-recommendation is targeted to multiple stakeholders,	Mandatory	When no actors are identified or those identified are not the most relevant for specific action. The lead entity should be clearly identified.

¹⁷ Recommendation 7 of the Malawi 2019 school feeding evaluation <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108134/download/>

¹⁸ For further information on gender-sensitive evaluations, reference is made to the [Technical Note on Integrating Gender in WFP Evaluations](#).

¹⁹

Criteria/Standard: A Recommendations should	Mandatory/Desirable	How to tell when criteria is not met [With examples from PHQA reports and/or draft reports]
ensure to identify one lead entity with the others providing support.		Example: All the recommendations by the Malawi school feeding evaluation were targeted to “Ministry of education and WFP” which is too general and targeted to external stakeholder who WFP has no control over whether they take action or not
18 ...propose a clear timeframe for action (end date e.g., December 2024) based on the discussions during the learning workshop and other stakeholder debriefings . Where necessary (and ET has sufficient information), identify timing bearing in mind any sequencing issues that may affect implementation. Take into consideration critical pathways for implementing recommendations to ensure that proposed deadlines for (sub-)recommendations are realistic.	Mandatory	When timeframe is not provided for the overall recommendation/recommendation actions or when the time provided is be unrealistic, that is too long or too short. When the time provided for the action exceeds the time for the recommendation closure. Example: 6 months was unrealistic for the following actions recommended : • <i>Formulate a specific gender and protection strategy or action plan that defines the scope, purpose and goals of mainstreamed activities; Scale up access to confidential platforms for reporting complaints and grievances and sensitise communities to ensure that all voices are heard. Examples are toll free hotlines and suggestion boxes.</i>

Annex 1: Findings-conclusions-recommendations mapping (to be annexed to the evaluation report)

The evaluation report includes a mandatory annex mapping evaluation findings and conclusions against each recommendation. It should not be linear: a recommendation is likely to be supported by different conclusions which themselves are based on various findings. In some instances, a given conclusion might be the basis for more than one recommendation. See example below. This requires findings, conclusions, and recommendations to be clearly numbered in the main report.

In addition to including this mapping in the report's annexes, it is good practice to flag in the main report next to each conclusion a brief reference to the finding number(s) on which the conclusion is based as well as against each recommendation a brief reference to the corresponding conclusion number(s).

Recommendation [in numerical order]	Conclusions [by number(s) of Conclusion]	Findings and Rationale [by number of Finding]
Recommendation 1: [text of overall recommendation]	Conclusion 1	3, 6, 15, 27, etc.
	Conclusion 3	8, 16, 22, etc.
Recommendation 2: [text of overall recommendation]	Conclusion 6	...
Recommendation 3: [text of overall recommendation]	Conclusion 5	...
	Conclusion 3	...
Recommendation 4: [text] of overall recommendation		

Annex 2: Template for Evaluation Recommendations in Evaluation Reports & Evaluation Summary Reports

WFP evaluations should make up to 10 recommendations, aligned with the evaluation conclusions and findings

Recommendation	Responsibility (one lead office/ entity ²⁰ With other contributing entities if applicable)	Priority: High/ Medium	By when to should be completed (Month YYYY)	Rationale for making this recommendation
Recommendation 1				
Sub-recommendation 1.1				
Sub-recommendation 1.2				
.....				
Recommendation 2:				
....				
.....				
.....				
Recommendation 7:				
Recommendation 10:				

²⁰ Unless the evaluation is commissioned jointly with others, the lead entity for all recommendations should be within WFP