



## Technical Note

# Quality of Evaluation Recommendations

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Standards for Quality Evaluation  
Recommendations

## 1. Introduction

1. The purpose of this note is to set out WFP's standards and expectations for the quality of recommendations in evaluation reports. 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.
2. Whilst the primary responsibility of formulating recommendations lies with the evaluation team, stakeholder participation in forming the recommendations is key. Evaluation managers (EMs) should ensure that evaluation teams adhere to the required standards in relation to evaluation recommendations. This Technical Note aims to provide a succinct overview of those standards.
3. Well-formulated recommendations optimize the utility of evaluations. At the same time, weaknesses in their formulation are still common. A review of international practices from a range of sources identified the following typical weaknesses:<sup>1</sup>
  - The evidence behind recommendations is weak and the rationale for them is unclear. There is little or no connection to evaluation findings and conclusions.
  - Recommendations originate from one source (sometimes an evaluation respondent) and do not represent the considered and well-substantiated judgement of the evaluation team and/or of other stakeholders.
  - Evaluation stakeholders are not involved in the recommendation formulation process; hence recommendations may lack relevance and feasibility of action as well as ownership.
  - The evaluation report contains too many recommendations.
  - The recommendations are not in line with programme strategy.
  - Recommendations are not prioritized or sequenced – sometimes simply a list of bullet points.
  - Recommendations do not specify the scope or type of action or change, the timing, or who should be responsible for carrying out change.
  - Recommendations are unrealistic in terms of time or resources needed to implement them.
4. In WFP, recommendations are an integral component of evaluation reports and are intended to stimulate learning and organizational improvement by feeding into strategic and operational decision-making.

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted were WFP, ALNAP, UNICEF, SIDA, CIDA, OCHA, UNEG, FAO, IFAD, OECD, Save the Children, World Vision International, International Community of the Red Cross, Oxfam, USAID.

## 2. Concepts and Definition

5. Recommendations are closely linked to the evaluation principle of utility. They serve to improve programmes, strategies or policies. Recommendations should suit the needs of the organization that will be using them and be relevant to the context within which they will be implemented.
6. A recommendation is advanced by evaluators to address one or more 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*”<sup>2</sup>.

## 3. Standards for Quality Evaluation Recommendations

7. Three main areas influence a recommendation’s use and impact. These are:
  - i. the process of formulating recommendations;
  - ii. the content of recommendations; and
  - iii. the structure and organization of recommendations.
8. For these three elements, OEV defines the quality standards below. These are largely based on guidance from the United Nations Evaluation Group, namely the [UNEG Checklist on Quality of Evaluation Recommendations](#), and adapted for WFP use. Furthermore, these standards ensure that recommendations are of an appropriate format so that progress in their implementation can be tracked through the corporate Risk and Recommendation System (R2) of WFP. EMs and evaluation teams should work to meet these quality standards.

### 3.1. Process of formulating recommendations

9. Recommendations are not formulated only at the end of an evaluation by the evaluation team. In fact, if the EM takes steps as early as in the preparation stage of the evaluation, this will make a difference in the quality of recommendations. When the EM identifies the evaluation users in the TOR, this sets the stage for engaging them throughout the evaluation process and especially in the formulation of the recommendations. Evaluation stakeholders should discuss and validate recommendations, with the understanding that ultimately the evaluation team has the final say on their content. Table 1 summarizes the main criteria that the evaluation team (supported by the EM) should apply in the process of formulating recommendations.

**Table 1. Process of formulating recommendations**

	Criteria
1	Identify the evaluation users in TOR and IR, who can be potential users of recommendations.
2	Clarify how evaluation results will be utilised and by whom.
3	Consider multiple stakeholders’ perspectives, in particular those of marginalized groups (such as persons with disabilities, women, the elderly, minorities, etc.).
4	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.
5	Create opportunities for intended users and other reference group members to help conceptualize and refine draft recommendations, e.g. during a learning workshop held towards the end of the reporting phase.
6	Ask intended users and other reference group members to provide comments on the draft recommendations. A good practice in this regard is to encourage intended 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, etc.

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

### 3.2. Recommendation content

10. The content of a recommendation is another main determinant of the likely use and impact of the recommendation on WFP's work. Table 2 displays quality criteria that ensure an adequate content of recommendations.

**Table 2. Recommendation content**

	Criteria – Recommendations should...
1	...be relevant and well aligned to the evaluation's purpose and objectives.
2	...address all the critical areas identified by the analysis/findings with no gaps. Should there be too many areas needing follow-up, then the evaluation team should prioritize fewer but critical areas. Having a smaller set of the most important recommendations might increase the likelihood of follow-up.
3	...clearly and logically derive from the analysis/findings and conclusions. <sup>3</sup>
4	...be internally consistent and take into account interdependencies between proposed/recommended actions.
5	...be constructive.
6	...be concise and precise.
7	...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.
8	...leave room to implementers and users for fine-tuning the implementation approach.
9	...use appropriate active language, using words like <i>should</i> or <i>must</i> to express advisability or necessity.
10	...focus on what action WFP can take, rather than those hoped for from external stakeholders. If a recommendation is rather the responsibility of an external stakeholder, it should be formulated as follows: “[WFP entity] should advocate for [required change] with [external stakeholder]”. In the context of a Joint Evaluation, recommendations can be targeted to one or all the commissioning entities.
11	...orient towards actions that clearly deliver benefits in proportion to their costs (i.e. providing value for money).
12	...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. <sup>4</sup>
13	...where appropriate, include relevant priorities for action 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.).
14	...have been subject to do-no-harm and risk analysis.
15	...provide a short rationale and implications (why is the recommendation made, why is it important, and what improvements should it drive in WFP's effectiveness, efficiency, impact, relevance, sustainability, appropriateness, connectedness, coherence or coverage).
16	...identify clearly who should take action for each recommendation (and, if different, sub-recommendation). In case the recommendation/sub-recommendation is targeted to multiple stakeholders, ensure to identify one lead entity with the others providing support.
17	...propose a clear timeframe for action. Where necessary, identify timing issues that may affect implementation.

<sup>3</sup> See annex 1 for a graphical presentation of how recommendations are linked to findings/conclusions that can support the Team Leader and Evaluation Manager in assessing the quality of the recommendations.

<sup>4</sup> For further information on gender-sensitive evaluations, reference is made to the [Technical Note on Integrating Gender in WFP Evaluations](#).

### 3.3. Recommendation structure and organization

11. 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 3. Recommendation structure and organization**

	Criteria – Recommendations should...
1	...consist of short paragraphs describing up to ten recommendations (with possible sub-recommendations – no more than five per recommendation). An exception are CSPEs, which should limit the number of recommendations to six that do not exceed 1,000 words in total.
2	<p>...have actions drafted against the overall recommendation, as in the management response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the recommendation is primarily about one main action, consider wording the recommendation as one overall recommendation without sub-recommendations.</li> <li>• If instead, the recommendation entails several different elements, consider defining an overall recommendation along with sub-recommendations. The overarching recommendation should be a summary of the sub-recommendations and not require any action other than those needed to address the different sub-recommendations.</li> </ul>
3	...be grouped/sequenced based on criteria such as the themes they address, whether they are strategic/operational, or whether they are of a short-, medium- or long-term nature.
4	... be prioritized in accordance with their importance and urgency (high or medium priority).
5	...be numbered (Recommendation 1, 2, 3, etc.).

12. Annex 2 provides a template for the recommended structure of recommendations in evaluation reports and summary evaluation reports.
13. Further details on the implementation of and follow-up on recommendations for decentralized evaluations is available in the Technical Note on [Management Response to Decentralized Evaluation Recommendations](#). The Corporate Planning and Performance Division (CPP) provides guidance related to the Management Response to centralized evaluations in the [Standard Operating Procedure for Management Responses to Centralized Evaluations](#).

## 4. Thematic Tagging

14. The R2 recommendation tracking system includes a thematic tagging of evaluation recommendations in order to facilitate the identification of systemic issues and a more qualitative analysis of outstanding recommendations. EMs for centralized evaluations and Regional Evaluation Officers for decentralized evaluations commissioned by COs are responsible for identifying the themes/tags that are relevant for each recommendation made by the evaluation that they managed. Annex 3 contains the tagging form. Upon approval of the final evaluation report, the completed form should be sent to CPP for centralized evaluations as well as decentralized evaluations commissioned by HQ Divisions or RBs and to the responsible Regional Monitoring Advisor (RMA) for decentralized evaluations commissioned by COs. CPP/RMAs will insert the identified tags when uploading the management response into the R2 system.

## 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).

### Example

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

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

#	Recommendation	Recommendation grouping (3 options): By type (operational/strategi) By theme Short/medium/long-term	Responsibility (one lead office/entity) <sup>5</sup>	Other contributing entities (if applicable)	Priority: High/Medium	By when
	<b>Recommendation 1</b>  Sub-recommendation 1.1 Sub-recommendation 1.2 <i>(if applicable)</i>					
	<b>Recommendation 2:</b>					
	<b>Recommendation 3:</b>					
	<b>Recommendation 4:</b>					
	<b>Recommendation 5:</b>					

<sup>5</sup> Unless the evaluation is commissioned jointly with other partners, the lead entity for all recommendations should be within WFP.

## Annex 3: Form for Tagging Evaluation Recommendations against Themes

### Recommendation Theme Tagging for the Evaluation of [Title of Evaluation] ([Publication Reference/MIS Code])

For each recommendation, an “X” should be used to mark the corresponding themes. Please select all themes that are relevant (multiple selection is desired; it is not mandatory to select tags under all categories).

The form for tagging evaluation recommendations against themes is available [here in editable version](#).

Themes	Recommendations									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Context</b>										
1. Corporate Emergency										
2. Relief / Acute crisis										
3. Protracted relief										
4. Post-conflict										
5. Development										
6. Rural										
7. Urban										
8. Covid19										
<b>Cross-Cutting Issues</b>										
9. Environment										
10. Gender										
11. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse										
12. Leadership and Governance										
13. Humanitarian Principles										
14. Protection/Human rights										
15. Equity										
16. Accountability to Affected Populations										
17. Advocacy										
18. Coordination										
19. Risk Analysis										
20. Information Management										
21. Knowledge Management										
22. Innovation										
23. Targeting										
24. UN Reform										
25. Systems/ systemic issues										
26. Operational Issues										
<b>Beneficiary Type</b>										

Themes	Recommendations									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
27. Children under five										
28. Adolescent girls										
29. Adolescent boys										
30. Men										
31. Women										
32. IDPs										
33. Refugees										
34. Returnees										
35. Host communities										
36. Elderly										
37. Persons with disabilities										
38. People living with HIV & AIDS/TB patients										
39. Orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC)										
<b>Unit/Level</b>										
40. Policy										
41. Strategy										
42. Country Strategic Plan or Interim Country Strategic Plan										
43. CSP Strategic Outcome										
44. Activity										
<b>Programme/Policy Phase</b>										
45. Needs Assessment & VAM										
46. Design										
47. Operationalization/Implementation										
48. Scale down/ phase out										
49. Scale up										
<b>Programme Areas/Activities</b>										
50. Food Security										
51. Nutrition										
52. Nutrition Sensitive										
53. School Feeding										
54. Capacity Strengthening										
55. Smallholder agricultural market support										
56. Livelihoods/food assistance for assets										
57. Adaptation and resilience to climate and other shocks										



Themes	Recommendations									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
58. Food systems										
59. Partnerships										
60. Services/cluster coordination										
61. Unconditional resource transfers to support access to food										
62. Emergency preparedness activities										
<b>Modality</b>										
63. Cash-based transfers										
64. Food										
<b>Functional Areas or Support Services</b>										
65. Resource Mobilization										
66. Supply Chain Management										
67. Performance Management/Monitoring										
68. Evaluation										
69. Management										
70. Programmes										
71. Human resources										
72. Budget and programming										
73. Administration										
74. Finance										
75. Information technology										
76. Security										
77. Communications										
78. Reporting										
<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>										
79. Relevance										
80. Efficiency										
81. Effectiveness										
82. Impact										
83. Sustainability										
84. Appropriateness										
85. Coherence										
86. Connectedness										
87. Coverage										
<b>SDGs</b>										
88. SDG 1										
89. SDG 2										

Themes	Recommendations									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
90. SDG 3										
91. SDG 4										
92. SDG 5										
93. SDG 6										
94. SDG 7										
95. SDG 8										
96. SDG 9										
97. SDG 10										
98. SDG 11										
99. SDG 12										
100. SDG 13										
101. SDG 14										
102. SDG 15										
103. SDG 16										
104. SDG 17										

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