Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP

The Office of Evaluation introduced policy evaluations in 2008. Since then, ten policy evaluations have been completed and a **Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP** has been developed after a careful analysis of these reports. Although policy standards and practice are not defined in WFP, the lessons present 'good practice' on policy formulation and will be of practical use when drafting new WFP policies. The lessons have been divided into two areas:

- **Policy formulation**, (lessons 1-7), deals with the elements required to ensure a high-quality policy design

- **Policy practicality,** (lessons 8-10), deals with the elements required to increase the likelihood of successful implementation.

WFP Policy Framework

New policies are often, but not exclusively, influenced by the launch of a new strategic plan and a shift in strategic objectives. WFP has a policy compendium that contains a summary of current policies and identifies policies that need updating, policies that have been superseded and potential policy gaps.

Between 2008 and 2015, policy formulation and decision-making was framed by a variety of governance mechanisms. However, in February 2015, the role of the Executive Management Group was consolidated to "continue as the primary locus of strategic thinking across the organization and for the agreement of policies […] prior to approval by the Executive Director". Policies are approved by the WFP Executive Board.

The Policy Framework Provides Direction

The *Policy Management Guide* states that "policies represent guiding principles to set directions within the WFP. They highlight broad guidelines on actions to be taken to achieve the organization goals. Moreover, policies act as a course of action to guide and influence decisions, (and to help) deal with day-to-day operational matters."

Policy Formulation (lessons 1-8)

Lesson 1: Include a context analysis and ensure timeliness for wider relevance

- A policy is made more relevant if it is contextualized within current debates on the topic and in the pertinent academic literature. Developing a policy is an opportunity to reflect on the organization's experience. It is a chance to codify existing good practice, increase clarity on the instruments to be used and provide systematic guidance for the agency.

- Ensuring that the policy is timely positions the organization's work within a broad and changing context.

- Including a clear rationale and justification for the policy sets the direction within the organization for new areas of work. It also allows the organization to respond to existing gaps and/or changing contexts, and to take into account new circumstances and emerging evidence.

Lesson 2: Define the scope and prioritize

- A policy should be broad enough to allow the organization to respond appropriately to needs in varying contexts. It should identify areas where the organization has a comparative advantage and a proven track record to prioritize when needed. The policy should also define, as realistically as possible, the scope of the organization's responsibility for specific outcomes.

- A long list of activity areas in a policy presents a risk during implementation.

Lesson 3: Develop a vision and a theory of change

- Developing a theory of change for the policy identifies definite objectives, expected results and a limited, quantifiable and realistic number of outcomes. It also highlights intended pathways of change, assumptions and risks, and provides a clear vision.

- Underpinning the policy with an explicit theory of change aligns the activities with an intervention logic, against which performance and results can be assessed.

Lesson 4: Ensure external coherence

- Policies should include an assessment of the external environment. International benchmarks should be taken into account and the policy clearly positioned in relation to them. A policy that coheres with international good practice and standards sustains a robust normative system or policy framework.

- Examining where other agencies stand on any relevant topics enables complementarity and reduces the potential overlap of mandates.

Lesson 5: Ensure internal and strategic coherence and integrate gender

- Policies should not be developed in a vacuum. Careful attention should be paid to cross-fertilization across policies and to internal policy coherence.

- Assessing strategic coherence ensures that policies are consistent and aligned across programmes and activities. It also helps to actively integrate gender into the policy. Assimilating policies with WFP programming facilitates decision-making and effective reporting.

Lesson 6: Develop evidence-based policies

- All policies should be based on substantive, comprehensive and valid evidence from internal and external sources. Using accurate evidence makes policies credible and relevant.

- Substantive and comprehensive analysis gives the policy a clear rationale. The lack of a carefully-balanced analysis can lead to advocacy rather than guidance.

Lesson 7: Validate and create ownership through internal consultation

- A broad, internal consultation provides momentum, generates understanding and builds commitment and ownership. Involving other technical units and regional and country offices gives the policy a practical orientation and identifies cross-cutting areas and bottlenecks at an early stage.

- Formal and pro-active dissemination of the policy, guidance and tools makes staff aware of the expected results and their responsibilities. With this, staff are more likely to achieve the intended results.

Policy Practicality (lessons 8-10)

Lesson 8: Invest in effective institutional frameworks, systems, guidance and accountability arrangements

- Policy implementation is improved by an action plan/implementation strategy that includes a results framework with targets and milestones. An estimate of costs should be included to support implementation.

- Establishing an effective organizational and accountability structure enhances coordination, oversight and leadership. It also supports learning and institutionalization and clarifies roles and responsibilities. This avoids silos and ensures integration across roles at all levels.

- Developing and rolling out practical guidance, manuals, tools and business processes translates the policy into action.

Lesson 9: Identify financial and human resource requirements

- Financial and human resources are needed to implement policy. Planning and prioritization are simplified when the budgetary and human resource requirements are clearly set out.

- Successful policy implementation requires the right combination of staff. This means investing in targeted recruitment and capacity development. Formal training and competency-development should be used to build the skills base needed to achieve the results set out in the policy.

Lesson 10: Integrate monitoring, evaluation and reporting systems

- The policy's monitoring and evaluation plan should be integrated into the WFP programme. This facilitates the measurement, analysis, reporting and evaluation of results and increases awareness of the policy in country offices and with partners.

- There should be a strong link between the outcomes and objectives of the policy and those of the strategic plan. This ensures a stronger causal chain, enhances consistency in approach and strengthens monitoring efforts.

- Building internal coherence in performance measurement also improves project design, monitoring and reporting at a corporate level.