

Evaluation Brief

WFP Office of Evaluation: *Measuring Results, Sharing Lessons*



Synthesis of WFP Operation Evaluations (July 2016 – June 2017)

Context

In line with WFP's corporate emphasis on evidence and accountability for results and its ongoing organizational shift from food aid to food assistance, the Office of Evaluation (OEV) launched, in 2013, a temporary series of single Operation Evaluations (OpEv). Intended to complement OEV's evaluations of policies, strategies, country portfolios and impacts of core activities, the series was designed to efficiently deliver an acceptable coverage level of WFP's operations by independent, credible and useful evaluations, to enhance accountability and learning.

Subject of Synthesis

The operations evaluations series is synthesised annually. This is the fourth, and final, synthesis report, covering 15 evaluations conducted between July 2016 and June 2017, using a common process and framework, and three key questions:

- i) How appropriate is the operation?
- ii) What are the results of the operation?
- iii) Why and how has the operation produced the observed results?

Objectives and Scope of the Evaluations

The operations reviewed were implemented between 2012 and 2018 in vulnerable and sometimes volatile settings, from refugee camps to development contexts, all exposed to natural hazards. They were of varying types, durations and sizes, and had a total combined planned value of USD 2.3 billion and funding of USD 1.35 billion, targeting 19.7 million beneficiaries. The coverage of the OpEv evaluations by region conducted within the four years of the series broadly reflects that of WFP operations.

Key Findings

Operation Designs

Strategic Partnering & Upstream Engagement: This cohort – with the majority of operations jointly or closely developed with governments – reflects an increased trend for close partnerships with national actors in design geared to support policy and programme national frameworks for hunger solutions. However, shortcomings in capacity development designs are again reported (linked to incomplete diagnostics, lack of systemic view, unclear objective and/or implementation plans).

Use of evidence in design: Corporate investments in evidence-generation are starting to show results: evaluations positively assessed the evidence base of operations, resulting in appropriate operations design and scale. Increased gender sensitivity in design and decreasing reports of untested assumptions confirm more robust designs in this cohort.

Coverage and Scale: Unlike previous years, the (high) level of ambition is found to be appropriate to the humanitarian needs.

Appropriateness to needs: Operations' objectives continue to be assessed as broadly appropriate to beneficiary needs. Although activity-level concerns are raised in a third of evaluations, this shows improvement from previous years.

Concerns relate to: **Objective / priority setting** – in the nutrition and resilience activities in particular; **Targeting** – appropriate at geographical level, although shortfalls continue to be reported at activity level, sometimes for reasons beyond WFP control; **Transfer modalities** were mostly appropriate, although sometimes constrained by contributions.

Internal and external coherence: limited *internal synergies* continue to be reported in the majority of multi-component operations, but improved attention to *external partnerships and coordination* is noted in most evaluations.

Strategic positioning & Working in partnership

Partnerships with host governments continue to be characterised as 'open' and 'trust-based', with many activities jointly implemented. Increased *demand for WFP services* noted in several operations, linked to governments perceived comparative advantage of WFP (including for technical expertise, and logistics).

Relationships with UN agencies and co-operating partners are reported more positively within this cohort, with seven evaluations finding strong co-ordination with UN agencies, and nine note more strategic approaches to co-operating partnerships.

Results

Data availability continues to improve, with monitoring systems improvements noted in eight evaluations. **Outcome data concerns** persist, both for availability and quality/reliability – including lack of (robust) baselines, absence of data collection, often owing to limited resources, unrealistic/inappropriate targets. This year's cohort continues to report *data use* challenges, and features *emerging alignment with national monitoring systems*.

Output level - Beneficiary numbers and quantities of food, cash and vouchers distributed are the main output-level results reported. As for previous syntheses, the evaluations indicate that the targeted beneficiaries were provided with less food (65% of target) and cash (51%) than planned. All operations faced reduced duration, frequency, or entitlements of assistance. Reasons include limited *national capacities*; inadequate *funding levels* (noted in over two-thirds of the evaluations), *conditionality of funding*; as well as; *contextual factors*, such as natural disasters, conflict, violence and insecurity. **General distribution:** Implemented in nine operations, using a variety of modalities, reached the highest number of people (some 2.9 million annually, corresponding to 84% of planned targets for the period under review), with wide variation between years due to expanded caseloads linked to changes in contexts. **School feeding** reached 1.1 million per year, achieving the highest target of all activities against plan (88%), through 8 operations. **Nutrition** activities reached between 0.3 and a 0.9 million beneficiaries per year, through 13 operations, reaching 42% of target, largely due to funding constraints. **FFA:** with 750,000 beneficiaries reached per year, and targets achieved (70%) were relatively high compared to

previous years, perhaps owing to fewer funding constraints¹. [Cash-based transfers](#) were used in two-thirds of the operations, with USD 76 million disbursed between 2014-2016 (51% of target, continuing the upward trend of the series). Most evaluations reported overall appropriateness of transfer modality used, however a third noted that capacity to respond to local preferences in modality were constrained by donor preferences.

Outcome level – Data availability has improved from previous syntheses, although still somewhat limited at outcome level [Quality of data](#) continues to be a challenge. The performance of the cohort broadly reflects the achievements of the corporate-wide performance reported in the 2015 Annual Performance Report. WFP's traditional areas of strength, Strategic Objectives 1 (saving lives and protect livelihoods) and 2 (support or restore food and nutrition security and rebuild livelihoods), show consistent available evidence and strong achievement. Strategic Objectives 3 (reduce risk and enable people, communities and countries to meeting food and nutrition needs) and 4 (reduce undernutrition) shows more limited availability of evidence and/or more variable performance. [Under-reporting](#) is less an issue as in previous syntheses, but some results are still not captured by corporate systems. The evaluations reveal significant contributions to Sustainable Development Goals and Zero Hunger Challenge, including strengthened economic activity, increased and/or diversified agricultural production, increased household incomes, access to health services, enhanced resilience, and stabilised food prices.

Gender, protection and accountability to affected populations: these areas show mixed results. [Protection:](#) targets were mostly met. [Accountability to affected populations:](#) over half of evaluations reporting recorded targets met, with beneficiaries well informed of entitlements and complaints processes established. [Gender:](#) shows progress with design of seven operations informed by a gender analysis, however implementation focused mainly on 'including women'. Gender results are generally reported against the gender corporate performance indicators; contributions to [transformational change](#) continues to be reported, including reduced workload, or increased control over resources for and by women, albeit still limited in scale.

Building enabling environments: This cohort records continued progress beyond immediate results for beneficiary. Valuable [contributions to national policy and accountability environments](#) in social protection and safety nets, education, nutrition and disaster preparedness and risk reduction are highlighted. [Capacity gains](#) are registered (namely in emergency preparedness and response, food security monitoring and analysis, nutrition, resilience at community level). [Sustainability and transition](#) continue to be assessed as weak, yet with a slight improvement from previous years, nonetheless nine evaluations report inadequate planning for transition. An increasing role for WFP as [a solutions broker for hunger solutions](#) is noted, characterised by capacity to: generate evidence, transfer knowledge innovate, demonstrate convening power in partnerships.

Explanatory factors

Factors constraining achievement of results are both *external* (operational context, insufficient funding in terms of volume or type/duration, limited staffing of partners in terms of number and/or technical capacity), and *internal* (limited human resources– limiting technical capacity (especially in gender, protection, nutrition, resilience and monitoring). At activity level, design flaws), weak attention to synergies, and weaknesses in targeting are reported. Enabling factors include more evidenced-based designs, conducive national policy and programming environments (namely in social protection), increased implementation through national systems, established credibility with government partners, adaptive capacity, willingness to innovate, and transparent communications in support of partnerships.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

Overall Assessment

This synthesis confirms movement from a 'go it alone' *deliverer of food* towards a *broker of hunger and nutrition solutions* in partnerships, with WFP increasingly engaging in *upstream policy spaces*. Supply of evidence, transfer knowledge and innovation have positioned WFP as the '*partner of choice*' for many governments. Findings suggest that many WFP managers are adopting a broader *systems view*, for consistent with the direction set by the Integrated Roadmap.

This mind-set is still not consistently applied across operations: alignment with social protection and resilience frameworks remains uneven; implementation is insufficiently shaped by performance data; however evidence generation is producing results. WFP operations show increased *gender sensitivity*, but approaches remain largely focused on 'including women' rather than gender transformational change.

WFP remains constrained by funding in terms of shortfalls and conditionality of contributions limiting, and this limits flexibility, especially in vulnerable and volatile contexts where this is paramount for ability to deliver, test and innovate, and to build bridges across the humanitarian development nexus.

This synthesis shows that WFP is better positioned, with technical capacity and assets, entrepreneurial approach and service-mindedness galvanised through recent corporate reforms, however sustained attention to implementing the full range of organisational reforms will be required for WFP to fully contribute to achievement of Zero Hunger and manage risk in an increasingly complex world. The key requisites include a firm evidence base; adaptive capacity; a solutions focus; political astuteness; and a partnership ethos. At present these are well demonstrated by WFP, though not always systematically applied.

Lessons Learned

Six lessons were identified to support WFP to continue optimizing performance. They pertain to: brokering strategic hunger solutions; adopting a system's view; preparing for transition; increasing use of data for optimised performance management; moving towards gender transformation; and advocating for more enabling financial support.

¹ It is notable that unpredictability of funding does not feature in this synthesis, unlike previous years.

Reference:

Full and summary reports of the evaluation are available at <http://www1.wfp.org/independent-evaluation>
For more information please contact the Office of Evaluation WFP.evaluation@WFP.org