Evaluation of WFP Policy on Humanitarian Protection

Context

WFP's policy on humanitarian protection was approved by the WFP Executive Board in 2012. This evaluation covers the period since then through 2017, and was coordinated with the Evaluation of WFP's policies on humanitarian principles and access in humanitarian contexts.

As well as complying with the WFP requirement that policies be evaluated within four–six years of their adoption, the evaluation was timely given the alignment of WFP's strategic planning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the rollout of WFP's Integrated Road Map (2017–2021).

Scope of the Evaluation

The evaluation was intended for both accountability and learning purposes. It assessed: i) the quality of the policy ii) results achieved, and iii) factors affecting the results observed.

Data-gathering tools and methods included: an extensive document review; review of comparator organizations; field visits to six country operations (Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Lebanon, the Niger and Uganda); six country desk studies; key informant interviews with WFP staff, partners, beneficiaries and donors; surveys with WFP staff and partners; and analysis of data from monitoring and complaint and feedback mechanisms.

Key Findings

Quality of the policy

The evaluation found that WFP's humanitarian protection policy clearly drew on international discourse. It did not articulate a specific vision or provide contextual analysis, but it was clearly informed by the earlier WFP protection project of 2005–2008, which generated organizational change and increased recognition in WFP of the significance of protection in the provision of food assistance.

Development of the policy helped to increase sensitivity to protection issues in WFP and encouraged the development of related strategies, such as strategies for ensuring accountability to affected populations and data protection.

Ambiguities in the policy document and supporting guidance were initially useful in helping WFP to define its role in protection but ultimately led to an operational focus that did not fully consider broader protection risks and hampered the translation of norms into practice.

The evaluation identified several weaknesses: the policy and ancillary guidance material lacked a clear framework of responsibility and accountability for senior managers; there was no theory of change, or precise objective, that went beyond internal capacity building and related to external outcomes.

The evaluation noted improved corporate reporting on protection, but corporate indicators were found to be too narrowly defined to inform programmes about specific protection issues. The evaluation also found a broad conflation of gender issues with protection.

Results

WFP invested in diverse efforts to strengthen its engagement in protection. These included boosting capacities through training and the recruitment of regional humanitarian advisers, integrating new indicators into the corporate results framework and developing guidance on protection, accountability to affected populations, gender-based violence and data protection. Examples of good protection practice through effective programming were found in various types of operations, including in development settings. Staff were often motivated to protect the people that WFP serves but were uncertain about how to apply the policy in practice.

Progress across the six policy directions was uneven, with greater advancements in internal capacity development than in other areas such as the management of partnerships and protection-related information. Considerable investment was made in protection training, but there was little evidence that the training translated fully into practice. A lack of consolidated systems for managing protection data potentially exposes beneficiaries and affected populations to protection risks. At the same time, there was greater understanding in WFP of the linkages between risks to populations, reputational risks and operational risks to staff and assets.

The evaluation found evidence of positive outcomes in several areas, including reduced safety risks and heightened respect for beneficiaries. WFP demonstrated a strong institutional awareness of the importance of avoiding discrimination and providing support in a manner that respected the dignity of recipients.

Explanatory Factors for Results Achieved

The evaluation identified several factors that have both enabled and constrained application of the policy.

External factors

Funding and donor support

Lack of resources hampered policy implementation and the hiring of dedicated protection personnel throughout WFP. Donors consistently expect greater integration of protection into WFP programming but the lack of systematic reporting and analysis of protection concerns prevented WFP from demonstrating the full value of its interventions to mobilize resources.

Partnership and coordination

The evaluation found that WFP actively participated in protection clusters but made limited use of partnerships to implement protection approaches. At times, low awareness and capacity of national cooperating partners and strategic alliances and partnerships with governments, constrained implementation.

Internal

The primary factors found to affect results were institutional factors: lack of leadership and corporate prioritization of policy implementation, combined with limited investment and inadequate institutional arrangements for implementation constrained results.

The bottom-up process of policy development enhanced relevance and facilitated implementation of the policy. However, the lack of a coherent corporate vision resulted in uneven implementation and different interpretations of its practical application.

A diffuse normative framework with multiple policies relating to protection resulted in competing and overlapping policy priorities that inhibited the organizational change called for in the policy. Interlinkages with the WFP Gender Policy both benefited and constrained implementation of the protection policy.

Conclusions

Significant results were achieved, but there is considerable scope to increase the policy's impact with more systematic and sustained institutional commitment. Tensions among the definitions of protection in the policy prevented systematic attention to strategic issues, including when food is used as an instrument for asserting power.

Lessons

The growing consensus in the United Nations regarding the need for respectful and systematic upholding of human rights has placed WFP in a privileged position. WFP is undertaking a transformational change to align its results with the SDGs and can now build on the significant work carried out over the past five years to reinforce the priority given to protection within the organization.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. In 2018, WFP should formally affirm that protection of and accountability to affected populations are among its core responsibilities in playing its role in food security and partnerships (SDGs 2 and 17). By 2019, the Policy and Programme Division should prepare a new humanitarian protection policy.

Recommendation 2. By 2019, the Enterprise Risk Management Division should ensure that the corporate "line of sight" clarifies the links between risks and programming for protection. A WFP-wide risk and protection framework should be developed to include both risks to populations and programming objectives.

Recommendation 3. By the end of 2018, the Partnership, Governance and Advocacy Department and the Policy and Programme Division should develop a formal approach to resource mobilization to support the achievement of cross-cutting protection results.

Recommendation 4. By mid-2019, the Human Resources Division and the Policy and Programme Division should allocation additional resources to increase and formalize protection staffing and put in place skills training for targeted staff members, including senior management.

Recommendation 5. By the end of 2018, WFP should strengthen its analysis of contexts and protection issues by reinforcing the data systems for monitoring and evaluation and building on existing information management systems to capture protection-related information.

Recommendation 6. By the end of 2019, the Programme and Policy Division should develop a new strategy for engagement with affected populations and vulnerable groups, which should be based on strengthened community feedback mechanisms.