



Evaluation of the update of WFP's safety nets policy (2012)

CONTEXT

The "Update of WFP's safety nets policy: the role of food assistance in social protection" was approved by the Executive Board at its 2012 annual session and superseded the 2004 policy. The evaluation covers the period from 2012 to 2017 while also considering more recent developments.

The evaluation was timely given the considerably growth in the use of safety nets and social protection since 2012 by all governments around the world, focus of SDG 1 on ending poverty, including through the use of national social protection systems and measures, and increased use of cash-based transfers and social protection systems in times of shock.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation provides evidence, analysis and recommendations related to the Policy's quality and results and to the factors that influenced those results.

Data gathering tools and methods included: construction of a theory of change; document review; review of comparator organizations; twelve country case studies, five through field visits (Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Colombia, Egypt and Uganda) and seven through remote desk studies (Ecuador, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mozambique, Turkey and Sri Lanka); key informant interviews with WFP staff, partners and other actors; and review of 2016–2017 data from standard project reports.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was intended for both accountability and learning purposes. It is expected that evaluation evidence will serve the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit (OSZIS) in the Policy and Programme Division. Other stakeholders and users will include WFP senior leadership, policy-makers and programme designers in HQ, RB and COs. The findings may also be of interest to WFP governmental and non-governmental partners.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

The Policy Update established two key pathways for WFP work: i) direct provision of safety nets; and, ii) activities in support of government-owned safety nets.

Quality of the policy

The evaluation found that the Policy Update was aligned with the prevailing concepts of its time, encouraged alignment with national governments and initiated consideration of the links between social protection and humanitarian assistance.

The focus on safety nets was well grounded in WFP's established food assistance mandate. However, the Policy Update did not include a clear vision, purpose, results framework or discussion of gender or disability.

While the WFP guidance developed in 2014 and 2017 provided greater coverage and updated information on the ways WFP can contribute to national social protection systems, both the policy and guidance were hampered by limited dissemination and uptake.

Policy results

The evaluation found that the results observed are indirectly attributable to it through the influence of guidance, training and other initiatives, although awareness of the Policy Update was low.

While central investments in implementing the policy update were limited, progress on social protection work increased since the creation of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit in 2016. Significant efforts have been made to develop a global base of evidence on WFP's experiences in social protection. WFP country offices and regional bureaux were found to be implementing a wide range of safety nets and supporting social protection systems through technical assistance and capacity strengthening. The development of Country Strategic Plans has increased the focus on safety nets and social protection.

WFP partnered with other social protection actors, but competition for resources reduced the potential for collective outcomes and created coordination and prioritization challenges for governments.

Short-term, unpredictable funding and donor perceptions about WFP role in longer-term programming have put WFP at a competitive disadvantage for work in social protection at times.

Little evidence was found with regard to WFP's contribution to gender transformative outcomes, disability and accountability to affected populations in its safety nets and social protection work.

Factors explaining results

The evaluation found that WFP was widely viewed as a credible safety net actor based on its comparative advantages. However, the lack of internal prioritization has impeded development of WFP capacities in this area. Shortcomings were found in human resources, knowledge management and monitoring and reporting systems, underpinning WFP's ability to engage in upstream policy work, context analysis and systems thinking.

WFP's ability to analyze, understand and relate to government structures, political developments and overarching social protection systems determine how relevant and influential it can be.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation concluded that the WFP Policy Update was relevant and remains important; it provided a legitimacy for WFP's engagement in safety nets. However, the narrow focus neglected to position WFP in a broader social protection context and the lack of clear results framework, poor dissemination of the policy and guidance hampered uptake.

Creation of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit reinvigorated implementation of the policy. The e-learning modules supported learning and provided a link between the policy and practice. The recent dissemination of knowledge products, establishment of a community of practice and increased partnerships and engagement in global social protection fora further enhanced policy implementation.

Growing country office and regional bureau experience with social protection provides a platform to further develop WFP's approach with other actors. However, senior management prioritization for WFP work in social protection remains unclear. As a cross-cutting, policy-oriented topic, it remains challenging to operationalize upstream social protection work and ensure coordination across WFP and with other actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1. WFP leadership should confirm and sustain its commitment to supporting nationally-led social protection. A strategy for engagement in social protection should be developed and disseminated.

Recommendation 2. Strengthen mechanisms for coordination in social protection to ensure coherent cross-functional approaches.

Recommendation 3. WFP should develop a knowledge management component of the social protection strategy.

Recommendation 4. Identify the dedicated human, technical and financial resource requirements for building sustainable internal capacities in social protection.

Recommendation 5. Standardize monitoring of and reporting on WFP's contributions to social protection to establish a reliable base of quantitative and qualitative evidence on WFP's role and added value, and to enhance learning.