



Technical Note

Decentralized Evaluation Types

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1. Introduction

1. The purpose of this Technical Note is to describe the different types of WFP's decentralized evaluations (DE) and their respective purpose. Decentralized evaluations can focus on a specific activity, pilot project, transfer modality and theme or any other area of action at the sub-national, national or multi-country level. Regardless of their type, most evaluations attempt to foster learning and accountability, though a given evaluation may put more emphasis on learning versus accountability (or vice versa). At planning or preparation phase, key factors should be considered around strategic importance, feasibility, timing, donor requirements and partnership opportunities. Any type of decentralized evaluation can be commissioned jointly with partners. The [DEQAS Process Guide](#) is the main reference for WFP decentralized evaluations.
2. Since 2020, all WFP impact evaluations are managed by the Office of Evaluation and its technical partners (such as the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation unit – DIME), in close coordination with the WFP COs, programme teams at HQ, RB, and CO levels, and cooperating partners involved. COs interested to conduct an impact evaluation should consult the [Impact Evaluation Decision Guide](#) which sets out the most important considerations to determine whether an impact evaluation is appropriate for their learning needs and programme context.

2. Types of evaluations

Activity evaluations	
What is an “activity” in WFP?	An ‘activity’ is one element of a Country Strategic Plan (CSP), an Interim Country Strategic Plan (ICSP) or a trust fund. WFP has 13 corporate categories of activities ¹ , including unconditional transfers to support access to food; asset creation and livelihood support; school meals; and capacity strengthening among others.
What is an “activity evaluation”?	<p>Activity evaluations assess an ongoing or completed WFP activity, from design to implementation and results. They support learning on what works and what can be improved; and accountability for results vis a vis beneficiaries and partners.</p> <p>An activity evaluation can cover one or several activity(ies) within a CSP or ICSP but should not attempt to cover the entire portfolio. COs will gain more insights by doing a DE that focusses on a specific component for which knowledge gaps are important.</p> <p>An activity evaluation can also cover one activity across several CSPs/ICSPs in multiple countries.</p>
How are these evaluations used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To refine or adjust activities that are underway. • To inform the design of new activities or to learn how to introduce activities in other contexts (formative evaluation). • To assess the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of an activity that is implemented in different contexts; identify similarities and differences in various contexts. This can then inform the design of the activity in other contexts.
Pilot evaluations	
What is a “pilot” in WFP?	A pilot is done as an experiment or test before introducing something more widely. In the context of WFP, a pilot project aims at testing a new way of delivering assistance to improve humanitarian and development outcomes. That might mean new instruments, institutional platforms, partnerships, processes or programme designs. Pilots are often small-scale at first, to prove the viability of a new intervention or approach. It might be completely new or new only in a given country.
What is a “pilot evaluation”?	<p>Pilot evaluations tend to put more emphasis on the learning objective than accountability. They generate evidence on the relevance of a pilot project, its results whether intended or not, how those have impacted target communities. They must also take into account the factors that have influenced positively or negatively the results to determine whether the pilot can be scaled up in the same country or elsewhere; and if so under which conditions.</p> <p>The Evaluation Policy notes the importance of evaluating pilots prior to any scale-up or replication; hence the evaluation should take place once the pilot project is sufficiently advanced in its implementation but before decisions are made on the design of a potential successor intervention.</p> <p>Collecting baseline data prior to the start of the pilot as well as contextual data are critical for generating robust evidence. This requires pilot evaluations to be planned, budgeted for and designed at the same time than the pilot project is formulated. Since by nature pilot projects are limited in scale, the evaluation costs might represent a relatively high proportion of the total budget. If donors are questioning the evaluation costs, the EM should highlight the importance of such investment before decisions are made about scaling up the pilot project and allocating additional resources.</p>
How are these evaluations used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand whether the pilot project works, where, why and under what circumstances. • To inform decision-making about replicating, scaling-up or phasing out the pilot project and better inform choices and investments by WFP, partners and donors. • To capture innovations that are important for WFP’s mandate.

¹ (1) Unconditional resource transfers to support access to food; (2) Asset creation and livelihood support activities; (3) Climate adaptation and risk management activities; (4) School meal activities; (5) Nutrition treatment activities; (6) Malnutrition prevention activities; (7) Smallholder agricultural market support activities; (8) Individual capacity strengthening activities; (9) Institutional capacity strengthening activities; (10) Service provision and platforms activities; (11) Emergency preparedness activities; (12) Analysis, assessment and monitoring activities; (13) Other activities. Source: [WFP Corporate Results Framework \(2017-2021\)](#).

Transfer modality evaluations	
What is a “transfer modality” in WFP?	Cash, commodity vouchers and in-kind are three different types of transfer modality – the mode in which assistance is transferred to intended beneficiaries. Transfer modalities are not mutually exclusive. WFP uses one or a combination of cash, commodity vouchers and in-kind food based on an assessment of the household needs; and a context analysis. For more information, see Cash-Based Transfers Frequently Asked Questions .
What is a “transfer modality evaluation”?	Transfer modality evaluations assess the appropriateness of the choice of the transfer modality(ies) notably in view of beneficiary preferences, the intended or unintended results of various transfer modalities; their relative efficiency with the aim to understand when, why and how a given transfer modality or combination of transfer modalities best achieve the desired outcomes compared to another. They can take place before implementation (formative); at mid-term and/or at the end of an intervention.
How are these evaluations used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To refine and adjust design and implementation modalities of new or ongoing interventions, with a specific focus on the choice of the optimal combination of transfer modalities. • To identify the suitability and conditions, for possible replication or scale-up / to assess the effects of a scale-up. • To determine a model for the most effective and efficient mix of transfer modalities
Thematic evaluations	
What are WFP “themes?”	There no nomenclature of relevant themes in WFP, but those often include cross-cutting issues such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment • Protection • Accountability to affected populations • Partnerships • Innovation <p>This is not an exhaustive list and can potentially include any thematic area that is not framed as a specific activity type.</p>
What is a “thematic evaluation”?	A thematic evaluation may cover a theme across the entire CSP portfolio or selected activities. It can cover one or more countries, or have a global scope. A thematic evaluation might be relevant in the context of a joint evaluation covering a range of interventions that were not conceived as a joint programme but have a strong convergence in terms of objective and sector/theme.
How are these evaluations used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide a “big-picture” perspective on how WFP is performing and could further improve in a given thematic area. • To identify good practices in a given thematic area and within a range of operational contexts (sudden-onset emergency; protracted crisis or development context), or different countries/regions.

3. Evaluation criteria and types of evaluations

3. The evaluation criteria (see [TN on Evaluation Questions and Criteria](#)) that are applied to activity, pilot, transfer modality or thematic evaluations depend on the evaluation purpose, what is being evaluated and the timing of the evaluation. Table 2 offers a sample of evaluation questions by criteria and evaluation type, illustrating the link between what is being evaluated and the evaluation criteria, to help Evaluation Managers develop their own tailored evaluation questions.

Table 2: Sample of evaluation questions by evaluation criterion and type of evaluation

Criteria	Evaluation questions	Evaluation types
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the quantity, quality, variety and distribution meet recipient needs? 	Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did this innovative distribution method meet recipients' needs in this context? 	Pilot
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were the transfer modalities the most relevant to the context (market conditions, food availability, risks, gender concerns, seasonal factors, etc.)? 	Transfer Modality
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have GEWE issues been incorporated in the design of WFP food assistance programmes across East African region? 	Thematic
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To which extent did the activity x perform against its expected outputs and outcomes? 	Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the pilot more effective than traditional interventions at reducing MAM? 	Pilot
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To which extent cash transfers had better results in terms of increasing girls' school attendance than in-kind food transfers? If so why? 	Transfer Modality
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Across programmes, did mainstreaming HIV and AIDS programming improve recipients' food security? Where was it most/least successful, and why? 	Thematic
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is WFP's school feeding activity coherent and aligned with government and wider UN programmes? 	Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What have been the synergies between the pilot and other WFP and partners' interventions in the same location? 	Pilot
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is the choice of the transfer modality coherent with government and wider UN programmes targeting the same communities? 	Transfer Modality
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent GEWE and wider equity/inclusion issues were considered in the design and implementation modalities of the interventions? 	Thematic
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent were outputs delivered within the intended timeframe? 	Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did the pilot programme's innovative delivery system introduce any cost or time savings in reaching the remote parts of the country? 	Pilot
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which of the transfer modalities proved to be more cost-effective? To which extent other alternative modalities were considered? How efficient were the delivery mechanisms (shops, outlets, banks, etc.)? 	Transfer Modality
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where partnerships have been integrated into programming, and national partners assume more responsibilities, have there been gains in efficiency? 	Thematic
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the take-home ration affect school attendance, if at all? 	Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At what rate were families able to graduate from the programme after the introduction of the pilot methods, compared to baseline? 	Pilot
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where cash and value vouchers were used, to what extent was dietary diversity improved, if at all? 	Transfer Modality
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are national ministries scaling up programming as a result of capacity strengthening? 	Thematic
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the programme support community ownership and long-term planning for maintenance of the assets produced? 	Activity

Criteria	Evaluation questions	Evaluation types
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the pilot implementation successfully engaged with national and local government structures that may be interested in replicating and/or scaling up the pilot programme? 	Pilot
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the cash and voucher systems been successfully integrated into national social protection policies and plans, including shock-proof measures for accessing crisis funding and national databases for horizontal expansion? 	Transfer Modality
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Did mainstreaming/integrating the theme incorporate sustainability measures, such as capacity building of government (national and local), communities and other partners? 	Thematic

4. Data requirements and evaluation approaches

4. While all evaluations use WFP monitoring data as a source, the [TN on Evaluation Methods](#) offers more detailed guidance on data requirements and evaluation approaches for all types of decentralized evaluations.

Activity DE	Activity evaluations benefit particularly from monitoring data as WFP systems are organized by activity.
Pilot DE	The choice of methods will vary depending on the type of pilot. A transfer modality or social insurance pilot would likely combine quantitative data on delivery and results with qualitative data on how beneficiaries used their transfers. A logistics prototype might emphasize more quantitative aspects. For a pilot, it is valuable to consider how other data sources might help inform scale up, replication or closure.
Thematic DE	<p>Standard monitoring may not provide all the relevant and necessary data. Instead, thematic evaluations will draw on a large range of data sources and information, to ensure adequate coverage of a thematic area in different contexts.</p> <p>When thematic evaluations cover multiple interventions, it is likely that the evaluation team will have no logframe or theory of change or other analytical framework to draw upon and will therefore need to re-construct one ex-post during the inception phase. It will allow the evaluation team to weigh any observed effects, trace causal pathways and test assumptions (see TN on Using Logical Models).</p>
Transfer modality DE	<p>Prior to selecting a modality, an ex-ante cost efficiency² and cost effectiveness analysis should in principle be conducted.³ The evaluation should access these data and update them to assess the actual cost effectiveness and cost efficiency of transfer modalities adopted. Market analysis are also important for these evaluations, including secondary data from WFP and partner service providers, such as retailer records and financial service provider data.</p> <p>Efficiency is likely to be a significant focus for transfer modalities evaluations, requiring the use of more primary data collection, such as surveys of recipients of different modalities or other quantitative and administrative data. This will require increased time and budget but also generate detailed and otherwise inaccessible insights.</p>

For more information, visit our [external](#) and [internal](#) webpages, or contact OEV Cap/Qual Unit at: wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org

² A cost-efficiency analysis measures outputs against inputs in monetary terms and compares alternative transfer modalities in order to use available resources as efficiently as possible.

³ [WFP 2014 Cash and Voucher Manual](#) part A.4.2.