



There are many breastfeeding positions

# Synthesis of Evidence and Lessons on Country Capacity Strengthening from Decentralized Evaluations



**World Food Programme**

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

## CONTEXT

WFP's long-standing commitment to country capacity strengthening is reflected namely in the WFP policy on capacity development. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development launched in 2015 provided further impetus to strengthen support for countries in pursuing their Sustainable Development Goal targets, particularly for Goals 2 and 17. WFP developed a framework and approach to country capacity strengthening (CCS) in 2017 that comprises five pathways of change and activities within three domains: laws, policies, strategies and procedures (enabling environment); well-functioning organizations (organizational domain); and educated, skilled people (individual domain).

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE SYNTHESIS

Syntheses are used to answer questions and highlight issues emerging from an existing evaluative evidence base. Synthesis of evaluations is one way to respond to a growing interest in and demand for succinct and actionable analysis drawing from completed evaluations. This synthesis comprises 32 decentralized evaluations completed between 2016 and 2019, which included country capacity strengthening among other WFP activities.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE SYNTHESIS

The objectives were to: i) draw lessons from evaluations on CCS; ii) assess WFP performance and results of CCS interventions; iii) identify common themes and systemic issues relating to the design and implementation of CCS interventions; and, iv) provide insights for country offices designing CCS interventions in Country Strategic Plans.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Relevance of CCS interventions

The analysis showed that CCS is integral to WFP interventions and approaches, regardless of programme or region and their design closely aligned with national priorities. Improved

identification of specific capacity needs and attention to local context would have increased the relevance of CCS interventions.

### Results of CCS interventions

WFP contributes mostly to strengthening the capacities of state actors at the organizational level. The synthesis also found evidence of results achieved in the individual domain, but less so at the level of the enabling environment. The analysis of qualitative evidence showed that more results were achieved than formally reported. Indeed only 13 evaluations included some CCS monitoring data and only four stated that monitoring was satisfactory. This reflects a gap in expertise in relation to the design, measurement and implementation of CCS interventions.

Effectiveness related to gender equality or empowerment was mixed, with more extensive reporting of results at outputs rather than outcome levels. Eight evaluations demonstrated achievement of gender-sensitive implementation targets and 13 evaluations provided partial evidence of CCS-related gender-sensitive outcomes. Few evaluations had any evidence regarding how CCS interventions related to protection or accountability to affected populations.

### Factors contributing to or hindering CCS success

Strong and trusted partnerships underpinned CCS success in all evaluations analyzed. Long-term investments in relationships with institutional and organizational partners and adaptation to local context were also critical to achieving positive results. Whereas evaluations in the sample did not make explicit reference to the pathways identified in the 2017 CCS framework, the principles of partnership, ownership, trust, recognition of existing capacity and needs, and time required to develop self sufficient capacity for transition<sup>1</sup> were identified in the evaluations as necessary for successful CCS interventions.

Hindering factors to CCS success included weak and inconsistent monitoring, lack of expertise, embedding of

<sup>1</sup> The CCS principles have been paraphrased from WFP. 2017. WFP Corporate Approach to CCS Toolkit Component 001.

capacity strengthening and of resources for promoting CCS.

### Sustainability of CCS interventions

The extent to which CCS has contributed to sustainable positive changes in capacity is difficult to assess due to a lack of clearly articulated CCS objectives across the interventions, combined with inadequate monitoring. However, some evaluations did demonstrate positive contributions to sustainability through robust transition planning, formal documentation of sustainability arrangements, and the preparation of budgets and adequate staff in place for continued operations. Where appropriate, transition plans identifying clear roles and responsibilities as well as arrangements to ensure sustainability need to be prepared.

## CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

The synthesis affirmed the importance of CCS to the achievement of WFP's objectives, particularly in supporting countries to strengthen their capacities in food security and nutrition. The evaluations provide indications of long-term positive capacity change as a result of CCS interventions. However, WFP uneven monitoring and under-reporting of CCS achievements affects its ability to identify and showcase results and strengthen its own learning.

The most effective interventions in the sample were long-term and had a high degree of coordination between partners. The findings show that mapping of capacity needs and strong partner coordination, including with local communities, enabled WFP to customize CCS approaches to the specific context.

Country capacity strengthening interventions that delivered simultaneously in all three domains (individual, organizational and enabling environment) made the greatest contributions to long-term outcomes.

Issues raised in the 2016 internal audit of WFP's country capacity strengthening and the 2017 evaluation of the capacity development policy remain valid: including inconsistent and incomplete approaches to CCS, lack of expertise to support capacity strengthening design, monitoring and implementation.

### Enabling environment

The synthesis found that CCS interventions focused predominantly on developing individual and organizational capacities and less on the enabling environment. This hinders the sustainability and scope of results.

Close alignment by WFP with the policies of national partners requires strong and trusted relationships that enable advocacy to be undertaken and grants WFP CCS interventions sufficient credibility to gain leadership attention. Long-term engagement strengthens relationship building and opens up opportunities for WFP to undertake advocacy related to government resource commitments and self-sufficient capacity.

### Organizational domain

Key factors for success in the organizational domain include undertaking needs assessments, focusing on continuous

improvement of government staff and establishing effective partnerships for CCS delivery and ownership, particularly with key state actors. Where these factors were not adequately pursued, success was limited.

### Individual domain

Positive outputs in this domain were reported and often related to capacity strengthening for individuals who work in institutions, including government entities. There was evidence of good practice in CCS interventions designed to promote women's participation in decision-making and increased access to training and information, but there was insufficient evidence of how these interventions were targeted and measured or of transformational gender approaches.

### Lessons

The synthesis identified several lessons aimed at strengthening WFP's engagement with state and non-state actors: (i) systems for CCS knowledge management and performance measurement are needed to enable continual improvement; (ii) conducting capacity needs assessments or utilizing existing data at the design phase could increase the scope and usefulness of CCS interventions; (iii) combining advocacy with technical advice that is aligned with national government frameworks for transformative change; (iv) synergies between CCS across all three domains; (v) collaborating with partners, including other United Nations agencies, and establishing (where appropriate) clear transition plans and agreements prior to transition help to sustain results.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** WFP should reaffirm its commitment to country capacity strengthening through the preparation of a new or updated policy that ensures strong integration of country capacity strengthening approaches into second-generation country strategic plans.

**Recommendation 2.** To strengthen and fund expertise in country capacity strengthening throughout the organization by conducting a workforce planning exercise (or similar exercise) and implementing a skills development programme.

**Recommendation 3.** To integrate capacity needs assessments into programme design and second-generation country strategic plans.

**Recommendation 4.** To refine the country capacity strengthening indicators in line with the new strategic plan and the corporate results framework for 2022–2026. Linked to this is the inclusion of qualitative as well as quantitative indicators to better capture and measure country capacity strengthening results, and the production of enhanced guidance.

**Recommendation 5.** To strengthen guidance and provide technical support to enhance the integration of gender, protection and accountability to affected populations into country capacity strengthening interventions and to ensure advocacy for and the mainstreaming of gender equality and women's empowerment in country capacity strengthening.