



**IMPACT EVALUATION**



**World Food  
Programme**

**SAVING  
LIVES  
CHANGING  
LIVES**

# **Annual Report for the Strategic Advisory Panel on Impact Evaluation at WFP**

2020 in Review

June 2021



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## Foreword



To achieve Zero Hunger by 2030, WFP and our partners need to identify what works best for the people we serve.

We have to know which interventions work best in each area we operate. To do this, we must both generate and follow the evidence.

In 2020, WFP continued implementing its first ever Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026), with

the explicit aim of supporting the organization to use rigorous impact evaluation evidence to inform policy and programme decisions, optimise interventions and provide thought leadership to global efforts to achieve Zero Hunger.

New programmes, technologies and data sources present opportunities for WFP to harness the full potential of impact evaluation as a tool for learning.

WFP's Office of Evaluation has established a Strategic Advisory Panel to guide efforts as we pilot new approaches to delivering rigorous impact evaluations.

As Director of Evaluation, I am pleased to share the Annual Report of the Strategic Advisory Panel, which captures progress to date and lessons learned from piloting our new strategy.

Director of Evaluation  
Andrea Cook

# Strategic Advisory Panel Annual Meeting

5 March 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

The Annual Meeting of the Strategic Advisory Panel (SAP) reviews progress made in implementing WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026). Following a presentation of the 2020 SAP Annual Report, the SAP discussed progress made in 2020, highlighted the importance of WFP efforts to increase the availability of impact evaluation evidence for fragile and humanitarian contexts, and reflected on issues for future consideration. Here is a summary of the discussion among panel members.

## DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ *Overall progress during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020:* Panel members welcomed WFP's ability to continue delivering its impact evaluation strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. All panel members reflected on the difficulties associated with switching to virtual engagements and remote data collection. WFP's Office of Evaluation (OEV) confirmed that the COVID-19 pandemic delayed all impact evaluations by at least six months, and the process of switching from in-person to remote engagements has been very challenging. Advantages of the WFP-DIME partnership model for delivering impact evaluations have been the presence of field coordinators in-country, strong cooperation from the country offices, and continued virtual support from both Rome and Washington D.C. to advise on operational and data related challenges.
- ▶ *Cross-country analysis & addressing programme specific needs:* The panel members highlighted the need to closely examine the common interventions and outcomes that allow for cross-country analyses. Since this will be the unique contribution of the window-approach, (see page 7) some members stressed the importance to keep cross-country comparisons central to the analysis. Members also pointed out that not all questions about programming can be answered through experimental methods. They suggested that the window approach is strengthened by exploring additional methods (simulation and qualitative) to answer these questions. This will also ensure

that the impact evaluations align as much as possible with the evidence priorities of the country offices while contributing to the window questions.

- ▶ *Revisiting the opportunities and challenges for remote data:* Panel members highlighted the importance of revisiting both the opportunities and challenges presented by relying on remote data collection, in particular, the sampling bias that can be introduced and high rates of attrition from surveys. OEV welcomed these reflections and will continue exploring how combinations of phone surveys, transactions data, satellite imagery, monitoring data, and others can be used to measure outcomes in a more representative and meaningful manner.
- ▶ *Maximising the use of data collected during impact evaluations:* The panel welcomed recent progress in collecting baseline and high-frequency data. They highlighted that the data collected during impact evaluations, including baseline surveys, can be a rich source of information for learning about contexts and improving the programmes being implemented. OEV welcomed these comments and sees the analysis of baseline and high-frequency data as a key next step in the process for ongoing impact evaluations.
- ▶ *Engaging local research capacities:* The panel enquired about the extent to which OEV engages with national researchers in its ongoing impact evaluations. OEV confirmed that this is a future priority but has so far been limited to the selection of field coordinators. Going forward, OEV hopes to engage in a more in-depth process of identifying the most effective avenues for both developing and collaborating with evaluation and research capacity either in-country or regionally in areas where WFP operates.

## GUIDED DISCUSSION ON LESSONS LEARNED IN 2020

OEV facilitated a group discussion focused on exploring the following question:

**Matching demand with windows:** Given growing demand for impact evaluations that fall outside of windows, what are the trade-offs between building evidence in pre-defined areas and generating evidence in new priority areas? What alternatives can be used to steer demand towards common evidence priorities?

**Creating a UN network or community of practice for rigorous impact evaluation:** Given the challenges encountered with joint impact evaluations, what steps can WFP take to identify counterparts and engage or support a community of practice interested in rigorous impact evaluations within the UN?

**Capacity to Deliver:** the current need to pair external technical assistance with OEV support, what partnership options (e.g. thematic, geographic, etc.) are better suited towards meeting growing demand? What configurations of staff and partners can be used to meet demand while also maintaining central oversight?

The questions led to a lively discussion and debate about some of the trade-offs:

*Bottom-up vs. centrally steering demand for impact evaluation evidence:* Panel members explored both the opportunities and challenges related to centrally steering demand for impact evaluations towards WFP's corporate evidence priorities. Several panel members highlighted that the value of an impact evaluation should be seen first in relation to its usefulness to a country context, even if it has limited external validity.

Impact evaluations should in the first-place feed into policy and programme decisions at the country level. Other panel members acknowledged that single, country-specific studies can add value, but can also often be ignored and fail to have an impact on humanitarian and development practice. The implicit trade-off between global vs. local demand is also misleading because the windows are conceptualised in close consultation with operations in WFP at HQ and country levels.

Ultimately, WFP will need to seek a middle ground, where impact evaluations answer questions that add to global evidence while simultaneously contributing to local decision-making. This may also require a more flexible window approach, possibly expanding the number of window-level pre-analysis plans (focussing on different research questions) used to guide country-level evaluation designs.

*Caution when creating networks and communities of practice:* The panel highlighted that numerous communities exist for evaluation, impact evaluation, and research, and sees limited value for WFP to engage in creating any new ones.

Panel members also highlighted that developing a community of practice requires significant resources, which may be used better in other areas. WFP will therefore first engage with existing networks. Some panel members also suggested to

broaden the existing FAO-led community of practice on impact evaluation to the other Rome-based Agencies.

*Importance of in-house capacity to conduct impact evaluations:* Panel members were unified in promoting the importance of increasing WFP's in-house capacity to conduct impact evaluations. Several members expressed concern that relying on external academic partners can result in unbalanced relationships, where WFP has less control over research agendas and the choice of methods and cannot realise the full benefits of evidence generated.

Other panel members highlighted that collaborative partnerships with external academic partners can be more durable than institutional or commercial partnerships. In many countries where WFP works, academic communities are more stable and don't suffer the high turnover rates of internationally

recruited UN staff. WFP will need to reflect on the level and balance of in-house capacity and types of partnerships required to maximise the benefits and usefulness of impact evaluations in the future.

## IMPACT EVALUATION STRATEGY REVIEW

The final agenda item was a brief discussion focused on the upcoming mid-term review of WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy. Panel members welcomed this effort and were curious about findings related to WFP's experience over the first two years. The panel members recommended focusing on how ongoing activities are meeting the objective set by WFP's impact evaluation strategy, and what adjustment may be required if any.



# Annual Report for the Strategic Advisory Panel on Impact Evaluation at WFP

## 2020 in Review

### INTRODUCTION

This annual report outlines the progress made towards implementing WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026) in 2020. Impact evaluations can make major contributions towards saving lives and changing lives. The WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy aims to contribute evidence on what works best to achieve sustainable development goals like Zero Hunger by generating operationally relevant evidence on what works and what doesn't, and under which circumstances. Delivering impact evaluations in WFP's operational contexts is challenging, which was particularly visible during the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Achieving objectives set out in the Impact Evaluation Strategy requires learning from experience gained by WFP and external partners. WFP depends on the guidance and support of the Strategic Advisory Panel (SAP) in interpreting lessons learned and identifying opportunities for improving its impact evaluation function. This report informs the SAP's annual meeting and discussion on how to finetune WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy considering emerging lessons learned.

### WFP'S IMPACT EVALUATION STRATEGY AND PILOT

WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026) aims to deliver impact evaluations relevant to WFP operations and contribute to global evidence. To do this, WFP identified four strategic objectives for impact evaluation, to: 1) contribute to the evidence base for achieving the SDGs; 2) deliver operationally relevant and useful impact evaluations; 3) maximize the responsiveness of impact evaluations to rapidly evolving contexts; and 4) harness the best tools and technologies for impact evaluation.

Achieving the objectives set out in the strategy is challenging. The first two years (2019-2021) of implementing the new strategy are therefore a pilot phase, during which OEV will assess the latent demand for impact evaluation evidence within WFP

and explore different models of delivering them in rapidly evolving contexts. During this time, OEV will work towards increasing capacity within WFP and establish partnerships to support evaluation delivery.

The timing of the pilot phase is aligned with the WFP Evaluation Policy (2016-2021) and lessons learned during the pilot phase will be incorporated into WFP's next Evaluation Policy. OEV will commission a mid-term review of the Impact Evaluation Strategy in 2021. The Review will provide an independent assessment of WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy, with the aim of ensuring that the strategy is fit for achieving the vision of producing rigorous impact evaluation evidence to inform policy and programme decisions.

Due to COVID-19, the review will be conducted before the completion of any impact evaluations initiated under the Strategy, limiting the scope of the review. The review will therefore be formative and identify areas for adjusting and improving implementation of the Strategy.

The SAP plays a key role in helping OEV to reflect and learn during the pilot phase and beyond, with its members providing guidance and direction for implementation. The SAP will support the mid-term review by advising on the scope and interpretation of findings.

### *Vision of the Impact Evaluation Strategy*

WFP uses rigorous impact evaluation evidence to inform policy and programme decisions, optimise interventions, and provide thought leadership to global efforts to end hunger and achieve the SDGs.



# Progress Implementing the Pilot in 2020

Impact evaluations initiated by OEV after 2019 align with the timelines of programmes evaluated and are supported in a manner that is responsive to changing contexts. In 2020, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic required OEV and its impact evaluation partners to shift to providing virtual support to programmes and increase the use of remote data collection tools. The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of impact evaluations that are responsive to evolving emergencies, a common challenge for WFP. The following is a summary of progress and adjustments made.

## IMPACT EVALUATION ACTIVITIES IN 2020

To ensure impact evaluations contribute to building bodies of evidence in WFP priority areas, in 2019, OEV began a process of creating impact evaluation ‘windows’ that align with programme priorities. Each window uses existing global evidence to identify questions that are important for programme learning and can be answered using impact evaluations.

Impact evaluation windows are developed by OEV in partnership with the relevant WFP programme units and selected external partners, which together form Window Steering Committees (SC). In addition, each window is supported by a Window Reference Group (RG), composed of global stakeholders identified in a thematic area, and a Technical Advisory Group (TAG), composed of academics with a deep knowledge of literature in the window area.

Windows test WFP interventions, and identify causal mechanisms, across different contexts in a manner that can increase the external validity of evidence generated. To support formal syntheses of this evidence, each window is guided by a window-level Concept Note and one or more pre-analysis plan.

In 2020, WFP decided to stop delivering ‘decentralised’ impact evaluations, which were being commissioned and managed directly by WFP country offices and programme units. A major challenge for decentralised impact evaluations included WFP’s capacity in country offices to manage long-term and complicated studies, in a context with frequently rotating staff and rapidly evolving operations. Instead, all impact evaluations are now managed by OEV to provide continuity and support, and to ensure that evidence generated

contributes to organisational learning. Whenever possible, priority is given to impact evaluation evidence that can contribute to ongoing and future windows.

## IMPACT EVALUATION WINDOWS IN 2020

The first three windows are being developed in partnership with the World Bank Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) unit and focus on 1) cash-based transfers and gender; 2) climate change and resilience; and 3) school-based programming.

### *Cash-based Transfers (CBT) and Gender Window*

With the growing global popularity of cash transfers as a modality for both humanitarian and development assistance, the need to understand the impact of such interventions is increasingly important. Programmes often target women or women-headed households as recipients of cash transfers, under the assumption that this is an effective way of achieving food and nutrition outcomes in target populations.

Following approval of the Concept Note and initial design discussions with country offices, a pre-analysis plan was drafted, and peer reviewed in 2020. The first set of evaluations in the Window aim to estimate the effect of increasing women’s earned income on intra-household decision-making, as well as on personal autonomy and gender gaps.

Does increasing women’s control over earned income boost their decision-making power?

Does economic empowerment of women affect the gender norms that surround them, or their self-perception?

Do food assistance for assets interventions using CBT improve psychological wellbeing and reduce the incidence of intimate partner violence within the household?

The CBT and Gender Window was launched in February 2019 with a call for expressions of interest that resulted in the selection of El Salvador, Kenya, and Syria into the window. Rwanda was added to the window in the fourth quarter of 2020. Overall, the first set of impact evaluations proposed by WFP country offices were not focused on humanitarian interventions. However, COVID-19 still significantly altered the timelines for all CBT and Gender impact

evaluations. It also prevented OEV and DIME from engaging in-country. The impact evaluation teams assigned to each evaluation switched to a virtual engagement process, often led by the in-country field coordinators.

In El Salvador, implementation of a suitable project (and subsequently the impact evaluation) was delayed due to the COVID-19 public health crisis and tropical storms that required the country office to divert funds towards emergency relief (in the form of unconditional cash transfers). A short pilot data collection to test the survey tools was conducted in February 2020.

Baseline data collection was completed in El Salvador in February 2021, incorporating the lessons learned from the pilot in 2020. Participating households will now receive cash transfers (a total of \$300) in the modality of food assistance for assets for three months. The programme's gender targeting and its activities for asset-building will be modified, and communities will be randomly assigned into one of the "modalities". The food assistance for assets programme is expected to last six months, with midline data collection taking place three months into programme implementation. End-line data collection will occur three months after final intervention activities, effectively six months after midline.

In Kenya, the COVID-19 situation required proceeding in two stages: First with a pre-pilot exercise, and second with a pilot impact evaluation targeting a smaller group of households. The impact evaluation team plans to conduct a pilot with 350 households in 16 communities, across three wards in Isiolo county. The baseline data collection for the pilot started in February 2021, with the plan to implement the full-scale impact evaluation in August/September 2021.

In Syria, WFP's programme partner is conducting a market assessment which will be used to design livelihoods programming that is appropriate to the context. Results of the assessment were received in May 2021, after which WFP Livelihoods unit will decide both the location and exact activities for implementation. Baseline data collection is estimated to start in the second half of 2021.

In Rwanda, WFP is conducting an impact evaluation of the Sustainable Market Alliance and Asset Creation for Resilient Communities and Gender Transformation project (SMART). The WFP country office initially expressed interest in the climate and resilience window, but it later became apparent that the project is a better fit with the CBT and Gender window, as the research questions focus on

women's social and economic empowerment. While formally being in the CBT & Gender window, the impact evaluation overlaps with the "Climate & Resilience" window to a high degree. WFP has therefore agreed to deliver an impact evaluation that contributes evidence to both windows, utilising "hybrid" survey modules. Baseline data collection in Rwanda was completed and three waves of midlines will be implemented in 2021 (staggered in sync with the phases of implementation).

In 2019, the Technical Advisory Group also recommended to conduct a targeted call for proposals in early 2020 to fit a certain cluster of evaluation questions that align with the window-level pre-analysis plan. Throughout 2020, the CBT and Gender Window coordinators worked with the relevant programme teams, regional bureaus, and country offices to identify an additional three impact evaluations. These engagements resulted in the addition of Rwanda to the window, and advanced discussions in Iraq.





## ***Climate and Resilience Window***

Together with conflict and economic downturns, climate change and extreme weather events increase the likelihood and severity of shocks associated with food crises. WFP supports a range of interventions that contribute to resilience building within the humanitarian-development nexus.

The Climate and Resilience Window was launched with a call for expressions of interest in late 2019, with the ambition of hosting a window workshop in March 2020. Eight programmes were identified as potentially suitable for the window. However, due to COVID-19, the workshop was cancelled. Over the following months OEV and DIME continued to follow changes in-country through a series of virtual engagements. All programmes originally proposed for the window have experienced significant delays and changes because of the pandemic.

Despite COVID-19 delays, significant progress was made in the design and delivery of four BMZ-funded resilience impact evaluations in DRC, Mali, Niger, and South Sudan. These four evaluations were officially accepted to be part of the window in 2020 and provided a basis for drafting a pre-analysis plan that can guide future window synthesis. A draft of the pre-analysis plan was peer reviewed in late 2020 and was revised in Q1 2021. Broad research questions guiding these evaluations include:

- ▶ How do integrated resilience programmes contribute to absorptive, adaptive, and transformative resilience capacities?
- ▶ How can multiple components of resilience programming be combined to strengthen resilience capacities?
- ▶ How do the timing of interventions and targeting decisions affect returns to programming?
- ▶ How do existing measurement strategies need to be adapted to better capture the shared BMZ-WFP resilience framework for resilience on multiple dimensions?

In addition to examining the window-level questions, the impact evaluations will also collect high-frequency data (bi-monthly or quarterly) on key food security outcomes and shocks to capture absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities through wellbeing dynamics.

## Window launch and selection process

Following the announcement to all WFP country offices in November 2019, OEV received expressions of interest from thirteen country offices to participate in the window. After initial screening, eight country offices were selected to move forward to the next phase of consultations.

Due to the restrictions posed by COVID-19 in carrying out in-country visits, the OEV's impact evaluation team organized extensive consultations with these eight country offices to understand their programming and identify opportunities for impact evaluation that align with the evidence priorities of the resilience window. Each country office discussion was facilitated by an OEV focal point and a researcher from DIME. Changes and uncertainties in resilience programme implementation (e.g. activities, timelines, scope, etc.) due to COVID-19 meant that developing a clear impact evaluation plan was challenging in some countries.

In addition to the technical elements, these consultations also discussed practical issues such as the timeline of programme implementation and the feasibility to provide in-country support for impact evaluation activities.

Bangladesh	Rwanda
Dominican Republic	Senegal
Guatemala	Sudan
Philippines	Uganda

After in-depth consultations, the impact evaluation team identified opportunities for answering a subset of window-level questions relevant to the resilience programme implemented by the WFP Senegal Country Office. After confirming additional practical elements, if an impact evaluation is feasible, Senegal will be invited to join the window. Considering the delays and disruptions caused by COVID-19 in 2020, OEV and DIME will continue engagements with other country offices to monitor any new resilience programmes being developed. Where there is interest and feasibility, support can be provided to the country offices to develop suitable impact evaluation designs.

## Ongoing impact evaluations

In the **DRC**, the resilience programme is jointly delivered by FAO, UNICEF and WFP, and the design process for the impact evaluation continued throughout 2020. The impact evaluation aims to capture as many of the programme outcomes as possible, some of which cannot be captured using traditional impact evaluation methods. The impact evaluation team is therefore working with programme counterparts to finalise a concept note that combines experimental and qualitative methods.

Evaluations of the integrated resilience programme in **Mali** and **Niger** are both part of the regional Impact Evaluation for Resilience Learning initiative in the Sahel. Following months of discussion, designs were finalised for both evaluations and baseline data collection started in 2020. The baseline surveys were completed in both countries in March 2021.

In **South Sudan**, the impact evaluation focuses on a resilience programme that is jointly implemented by UNICEF and WFP. In 2020, a significant amount of time and effort was focused on exploring design options that could capture the impact of interventions supported by both organisations on a range of food security, health, and education outcomes. Preparations are currently ongoing for the planned baseline data collection in June 2021.

## School-based Programmes (SBP) Window

In 2020, WFP reached a total of 15 million children with nutritious meals, school snacks, or take-home rations in the form of food or cash. School-based programmes are one of the most extensive social safety nets worldwide, with an estimated 388 million children currently benefiting from school feeding. Such interventions are intended to promote health, nutrition, learning, and the creation of human capital, while at the same time, stimulating local economies when school meals are procured locally.

There is a need for more evidence to inform the trade-offs in school-based programmes' design and implementation. For example, finding the optimal balance between cost, size, frequency, and meals' composition; whether meals should be provided on-site, as a take-home ration, or via voucher/cash transfer; whether the benefits of locally procuring food are greater relative to direct import. There is also a growing need to better understand how different school-based programme designs can play an important role as a social safety net protecting boys and girls during shocks.

In 2020, to generate evidence that can help with making informed policy decisions, OEV and DIME started developing an impact evaluation window in collaboration with the School-Based Programmes (SBP) division.

As part of the window development process, an OEV summer student volunteer from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) completed a literature review of school-feeding studies. The literature review was used as an input into a series of workshops and consultations aimed at identifying areas for further exploration, including:

- ▶ To what extent do different programme interventions, including modalities (in-school, take-home rations, or cash/voucher) or complementary activities, contribute to children's outcomes? How do these effects vary by age and gender?
- ▶ To what extent do different programme interventions (modalities or complementarity activities) contribute to greater girls' wellbeing?
- ▶ To what extent do different procurement systems (e.g. imported food vs. locally grown school meals) increase the effectiveness of programmes at improving food security and nutrition in supported communities?

- ▶ To what extent do different programmes' characteristics support households' consumption and food security in the presence of shocks?

OEV and DIME launched the SBP window in the first quarter of 2021.



## NON-WINDOW IMPACT EVALUATIONS

In 2020, OEV began supporting an impact evaluation feasibility assessments and design process in Uganda that may fit best with a future nutrition window. If feasible, the impact evaluation proposed for Uganda focuses on how to improve nutrition outcomes for pregnant and lactating women in refugee-hosting communities, and women with children under two years of age in refugee camps through a combination of cash-based transfers and complimentary interventions.

## IMPACT EVALUATION IN FRAGILE AND HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

In 2020, OEV began developing WFP's capacity to deliver impact evaluations of humanitarian operations. Efforts align with WFP's ambition to 1) maximize the responsiveness of impact evaluations to rapidly evolving contexts; and 2) harness the best tools and technologies for impact evaluation. Work commenced to develop impact evaluation designs and approaches most appropriate for rapid-onset emergencies and protracted crises, as well as engaging with communities of practice interested in this type of evidence.

In line with SAP recommendations in 2020, OEV also started preparing a library of designs that can be deployed during future emergency responses. Related activities initiated in 2020 included:

- ▶ Reviewing existing literature documenting past interventions to identify additional areas where WFP can contribute most to the global evidence on humanitarian interventions, including impacts on gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE) outcomes.
- ▶ Conducting consultation exercises examining the operational contexts, intervention types, and opportunities for optimisation. These consultations aim to generate buy-in and agreement for the most important questions to be answered to optimise humanitarian interventions.
- ▶ Identifying priority evidence areas for the design of impact evaluations that can be deployed at a short notice to examine the cost-effectiveness and support optimisation of humanitarian interventions at achieving intended outcomes.
- ▶ Developing data collection tools, processes (e.g. ethical reviews, quality support, etc.) and systems needed to track population

movements and collecting outcome data in humanitarian contexts.

- ▶ Starting to produce guidance for WFP staff and partners to use the design, tools and systems established for humanitarian impact evaluation.

Initial activities are supported by USAID's Food For Peace initiative.

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

OEV initiated a process of impact evaluation capacity development in WFP that aligns with the new strategy. Prior to the launch of the strategy, OEV had already developed guidance on impact evaluation methods that were aimed at supporting decentralised impact evaluations. In 2020, considering the shift away from fully decentralised impact evaluations, OEV began reviewing and revising guidance aimed at supporting WFP programmes to identify opportunities for impact evaluation, rather than manage them directly.

In addition to developing new guidance, OEV began a process of updating the quality assurance mechanisms originally created for centralised and decentralised impact evaluations. Prior to the Impact Evaluation Strategy, all decentralised impact evaluations were submitted for external post-hoc quality assessment Post Hoc Quality Assessment (PHQA) reviews. In 2020, OEV completed the procurement process for a new PHQA provider that will develop a quality assessment process aligned with the new strategic approach and the type of rigorous impact evaluations that will be delivered by WFP going forward.

## PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES IN 2020

WFP has limited in-house research capacity to design and deliver rigorous impact evaluations, which have been traditionally supported by external academics. However, WFP's experience with relying fully on external academics led to mixed results in terms of alignment of evidence priorities and timing of evaluations. To address these issues OEV has started to explore how partnerships can be created that are better suited to WFP's operational realities, and requirement for responsive support that adapts to changes in context.

The first impact evaluation partnership that aligns with the new strategy was formed with the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) unit for an initial five years (2019-2023). The MoU covers a wide range of impact evaluation activities,

including technical advice, design support, data collection, analysis, etc.

In 2020, the WFP-DIME partnership demonstrated the benefits of responsive and flexible impact evaluation support when facing the unprecedented changes associated with COVID-19. OEV and DIME worked together to support country offices and programme teams as they struggled to adapt timelines and processes to a context where traditional activities and data collection methods were no longer feasible. In addition, the breadth of the partnership enabled OEV and DIME to pivot together and focus on new activities that were better suited to the operational reality under COVID-19, including conceptual work required to develop the school-based programmes window and develop the humanitarian workstreams.

In addition to continuing to work in partnership, OEV and DIME started exploring opportunities for expanding the partnership to additional academic institutions. A first step towards this expansion is the inclusion of impact evaluation activities in a new partnership between WFP and Cornell University. WFP has a long history of working with Cornell on various projects, and the formation of a new partnership will offer OEV an opportunity to explore how academic researchers can become more engaged in WFP's new strategic and responsive approach to impact evaluation.

Regarding partnerships with other UN agencies, impact evaluations in the DRC and South Sudan were developed jointly with the FAO and UNICEF.

The design process was challenging due to differences in terms of the timing, level (e.g. community vs. household) and types of interventions, as well as the expectations for application of methods. In both cases, the designs differ from other WFP impact evaluations to cover a wider range of evaluation questions.

Outside of the UN, OEV continued to develop a community of practice around impact evaluation in fragile and humanitarian contexts. OEV engaged with the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP), Cornell University, DEval, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), ODI, Oxfam, and World Vision through reference groups for the cash-based transfers and gender-, and climate and resilience windows. For the school-based programmes window, OEV worked closely with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. OEV also continued strengthening WFP's impact evaluation partnerships with the Green Climate Fund (GCF), by continuing to support the Learning-Oriented Real-Time Impact Assessment (LORTA) as well as collaborating on the identification of suitable GCF projects for joint impact evaluations.

Finally, OEV expanded the type of partnerships it engages in by hosting a summer student volunteer from MIT. The MIT intern supported OEV by conducting a literature review for the school-based programmes window. The success of the internship in 2020 has led OEV to consider accepting new interns in 2021.



## IMPACT EVALUATION RESOURCES IN 2020

WFP's capacity to deliver the strategy depends on its human and financial resources.

### *Human Resources*

Experience so far indicates that the level of support needed from OEV to deliver impact evaluations in WFP is much greater than originally anticipated. During the pilot phase of the Impact Evaluation Strategy, the assumption was that external partners, such as DIME could directly substitute WFP capacity. However, because rigorous prospective impact evaluations are relatively new to many in WFP, programme teams require significant support to design and implement interventions in a way that can enable the identification of their impact on intended outcomes. In 2020, this became even more intense due to the switch to virtual engagements with country offices, which spread activities that were previously completed in a short mission, over several months of fragmented discussion.

To handle the growing portfolio of impact evaluations, in 2020, OEV expanded its impact evaluation team by recruiting a P3 level officer, P2 level officer, and a consultant, bringing the total to six members. In light of the upcoming mid-term review a decision was made to pause further recruitment until the operational model has been

reviewed and possibly adjusted based on lessons learned.

In addition to direct support to impact evaluations, OEV continued to build WFP capacity and awareness through the window processes, as well as senior level engagement with the Evaluation Function Steering Group and Executive Board. In 2021, OEV will explore the use of dedicated virtual training sessions to augment the more intense bilateral engagements with country offices.

### *Financial Resources*

OEV continues seeking ways to increase financial resources available to impact evaluation. Internally, OEV is working to leverage programme budgets. Each window evaluation is co-financed with the country office involved. OEV covers the cost of the management and technical support needed to deliver an impact evaluation, and the country offices commit to covering the cost of data collection. In addition, OEV continued to fundraise for impact evaluation activities.

In 2020, WFP's impact evaluation activities were increasingly funded by dedicated donor commitments. In addition to the USD 7.31 million in multi-year funding from BMZ, OEV received an initial contribution of USD 972,000 from USAID towards expanding humanitarian impact evaluation activities.





# Lessons Learned and Challenges

Reflecting on progress made implementing the WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy in 2020, a few key lessons emerge:

## 1 MATCHING DEMAND WITH WINDOWS

OEV continues experiencing demand for rigorous impact evaluations from WFP country offices and donors. However, the timing and nature of requests are often not a good fit with requirements for designing or delivering rigorous impact evaluations that align with a window. In addition, many requests fall outside the open windows. Finally, the types of programmes that express demand tend to be those that have a clearer timeline for planned future interventions, which biases the portfolio towards the development side of the humanitarian-development nexus. This situation is pushing OEV to revisit the way impact evaluations are identified and selected.

To address timing and feasibility, OEV needs to create opportunities to engage with programme teams before they finalise targeting, budget, and timeline decisions. Ideally, OEV would be able to support interested country offices as they develop funding proposals. In 2021, OEV will work with WFP's partnership and programme units, as well as regional bureaus, to explore ways of increasing awareness for the budget and timing sensitivities of impact evaluations.

To address the fit with windows, OEV is reconsidering whether the window-level pre-analysis plans (PAPs) are sufficiently flexible to guide demand from country offices. The window approach is designed to ensure that WFP builds bodies of evidence across countries and programmes. However, in many cases, the context, timing and flexibilities are limited within any individual programme. Instead of expecting every programme to deliver the same core impact evaluation design, OEV is exploring two options, i) whether a window can have more than one PAP to capture a wider variety of questions and programmes of interest, and ii) whether window-level PAPs can be sub-divided into a set of interventions that could be individually replicated in one or more countries to identify and test an underlying causal mechanism.

By ensuring a common measurement strategy and replicating one or more sub-interventions, it may be possible to generate evidence without fully replicating the same design in every country. This

would enable OEV to accept countries that are delivering similar programmes but have different levels of flexibility.

To address demand that falls outside of windows, OEV is considering how to cover the full range of WFP programmes. In 2020, OEV received many requests for support to impact evaluations that are focused on areas which are not yet covered by a window, such as nutrition and school-based programmes. It may be more useful if OEV works with programme units to identify evidence priorities for impact evaluations in their areas before an impact evaluation window is even launched. Each programme that requests OEV support in developing an impact evaluation can then align with the evidence priorities identified.



## 2 UN PARTNERSHIPS AND JOINT IMPACT EVALUATIONS

WFP often works in partnership with other UN agencies to deliver programmes. The impact evaluations in the DRC and South Sudan are the first examples where OEV is trying to follow the new strategy in a context where other agencies are involved. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity.

On the one hand, WFP cannot expect other UN agencies to conform to its definitions and approaches for impact evaluation, which rely heavily on experimental methods. Joint impact evaluations therefore provide an opportunity for WFP to use other approaches and methods of analysis alongside traditional quantitative methods. However, WFP is also aware that within partner agencies there is a growing interest in using experimental methods.

One of the early challenges encountered for partnerships is that many UN offices of evaluation are not directly involved in delivering experimental impact evaluations, which can be perceived as more of a learning than accountability activity. OEV is therefore exploring how to better engage individuals in other UN agencies that are interested in experimental impact evaluations but sit outside of offices of evaluation. The bulk of these engagements have been with other Rome-based agencies, but it is worth exploring whether there is a wider interest in the UN.

To improve collaboration within the UN, it may be helpful to start developing a network of agencies interested in rigorous experimental impact evaluations. The network could support developing a common understanding of when and how to apply experimental methods and serve as the coordination mechanism for future joint impact evaluations.



## 3 IMPACT EVALUATION APPROACHES FOR ADAPTIVE AND HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS

OEV initiated a range of activities in 2020 aimed at developing WFP's capacity to start generating rigorous impact evaluation evidence in humanitarian contexts. These efforts require OEV to rethink the appropriateness and application of impact evaluation methods.

Internal and external consultations are identifying a growing list of constraints. OEV is working with emergency operations teams to identify common processes that represent opportunities for significant learning, such as targeting- and transfer modalities. Emergency operations are critically time sensitive and limited in terms of the ability to identify a control group, collect household baseline data, etc. Following SAP recommendations in 2020, OEV is also developing a library of impact evaluation designs that are pre-specified to answer priority questions during future emergency operations.

In addition, OEV is exploring ways of combining within-treatment comparisons (e.g. A/B testing) with administrative data to test the marginal effectiveness of intervention options. Early consultations point to a strong interest in the potential application of these leaner impact evaluation methods across a range of WFP programme areas.



## 4 WFP CAPACITY TO DELIVER THE IMPACT EVALUATION STRATEGY

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of having in-house capacity to design and deliver WFP impact evaluations. The process of adapting each impact evaluation to rapidly evolving contexts was only possible with dedicated WFP staff available to work with programmes in real-time.

Technical assistance from DIME was vital when supporting WFP programmes to adapt in response to the pandemic. However, partners are unable to fully substitute the support provided by WFP staff. Each interaction between WFP programmes and external partners requires OEV support to ensure that the impact evaluations can move forward. In addition, where impact evaluations are delivered jointly with other UN agencies, the ability of a WFP-selected impact evaluation partner to work is dependent on the ability of OEV to facilitate that relationship.

Meeting the full potential demand for WFP impact evaluations will ultimately require the right mix of WFP staff and partnerships to support impact evaluations focusing on different topic areas (e.g. agriculture, economics, education, gender, nutrition, etc.). However, expanding impact evaluation partnerships or the supplier base without matching WFP capacity to support delivery, will likely result in many of the same challenges observed before the strategy. The level of capacity that WFP can develop will depend on organisational priorities and funding.



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