



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Formative research for transformative school-based programmes in Colombia

The World Food Programme (WFP) Colombia conducted formative research to inform its school-based programming, allowing schools to act as a platform for inclusion. The study focused on school-feeding, nutrition, discrimination and xenophobia in schools that experienced a range of challenges due to high rates of migration from Venezuela. Through this research, WFP aimed to better understand the needs of children and their communities by using two-way communication to identify barriers and enablers to behavioural change. The research provided an evidence base for the participatory development of a Social and Behaviour Change Communication strategy that promoted inclusivity and equality. This is an interesting example of how a school feeding programme can address additional issues such as discrimination, and promote not only nutritious meals for children but also create a safe environment and positively contribute to breaking stereotypes.

Formative research provides evidence

1

Evidence improves programming

2

Better programming leads to transformative action

3

Formative research leads to more relevant and effective programmes. It is an essential component of programme design that can be done rapidly and at low cost.



If we want to move to better programme quality and impact and if we want our programmes and policy-making to be people-centred, then we need to invest more in trying to understand not only what is happening but why it's happening. Because otherwise we are missing a whole part of the problem. This is a change of mindset that we need to make.

Former Nutrition and SBCC Officer, WFP Regional Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean



FORMATIVE RESEARCH PROVIDES EVIDENCE

1

▶ Collecting the data

- The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, focus group discussions and interviews.
- A multidisciplinary team of university researchers and WFP specialists (nutrition, school-feeding, gender, social protection, monitoring and evaluation, and SBCC) worked together to ensure that all key areas of interest were covered in the question banks.

▶ Key findings

- A significant proportion of the Venezuelan migrant children who participated in the research reported having experienced some form of discrimination, xenophobia or violence.
- Acts of discrimination were reported both in school and outside the school environment. Overall, however, Colombian and Venezuelan children considered schools to be safe spaces.
- 70% of the Colombian children who participated in the study and 90% of Venezuelan children suggested that they would like a 'typical Venezuelan meal' (e.g., filled arepa or pabellón) to be included in the school menu.
- Parents lacked information about the parents' committees of the school feeding programme and many did not participate.
- Different stakeholders identified a range of preferred communication channels, including Facebook, WhatsApp, television, newspaper and radio.

EVIDENCE IMPROVES PROGRAMMING

2

▶ Using the data

- The formative study was used to inform the development of a Social and Behaviour Change Communication strategy that promoted inclusivity and prevented discrimination and xenophobia in schools.
- Findings were validated through participatory sessions with a range of stakeholders, including school students and their communities. The sessions were designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the context and social dynamics of different communities.
- Creative activities and dialogue with community stakeholders were used to foster mutual understanding and to co-create the strategy, which focused on local solutions to promote positive change in knowledge, attitudes and practices

BETTER PROGRAMMING LEADS TO TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

3

The final strategy, *¿A que sabe la Igualdad?* (What does equality taste like?), works to strengthen the school-feeding programme as a platform for inclusion and equality in schools in four cities in Colombia (Cúcula, Riohacha, Barranquilla and Santa Marta).

▶ Learning from the experience

- WFP partnered with both an academic institution for the formative research and a creative agency for the development of the strategy. This ensured the research was rigorous and the findings could be operationalised effectively.
- Developing the strategy through participatory action ensured communities were involved and invested in the sustainable implementation of the strategy.

▶ Key considerations for formative research

- Ethical issues need to be considered throughout the whole research process. WFP social protection and gender advisors can provide support in securing parents' consent for research with children.
- Methods should be flexible, participatory and engaging, and a safe and secure environment should be created to ensure participants are part of the entire research process.
- Findings should create an evidence base for programming and be used in a timely manner.
- A flexible approach allows the research process to adapt to emerging findings and unforeseen circumstances (such as the COVID-19 pandemic).
- The involvement of local field researchers can help build trust between the research team and the community. Cross-sectoral partnerships and investment in building the capacity of local researchers will yield long-term benefits.



I felt heard. One of the things that I liked the most was that the ideas came from us.

School student during a session co-creating and verifying research results



Formative research can be used to make programmes more people-centred, relevant and effective, and to inform policy and strategy. It can help foster positive community engagement to support programme implementation, strengthen partnerships, provide evidence for advocacy efforts, increase organisational visibility and encourage investment from donors. **Formative research** should be seen to be an integral, embedded component of a programme and should be properly resourced.

