

# Evaluation Brief

*Decentralized evaluation for evidence-based decision making*



## Thematic Evaluation of Cooperating Partnerships in the Eastern Africa Region, 2016-2020

This evaluation of Cooperating Partnerships in the Eastern Africa Region was commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa in Nairobi (RBN) and covers the period from January 2016 to December 2020. The evaluation focuses on WFP's relationships with its cooperating partners (CPs), which include international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations and Red Cross/Crescent Societies.

### Subject of the evaluation

WFP's Bureau for Eastern Africa in Nairobi (RBN) oversees 10 developing, low- and middle-income countries in the Eastern Africa region. With some of WFP's largest and most complex operations, RBN is assisting over 20 million people. The countries supported by RBN are Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. Most of region's assistance is implemented through cooperating partners (CPs). Starting in 2016, WFP embarked on a process of institutional reform to reorient the organization's strategic objectives, programmatic and administrative mechanisms for cooperating partnerships in response to the strategic re-orientation (the Grand Bargain localization commitments; the shift towards country-level and multi-year strategic planning; and the IRM's increased focus on long-term engagement with national partners).

### Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation include both accountability and learning, with an emphasis on learning. This evaluation was commissioned to inform WFP's regional cooperating partnership strategy to meet its localization and Grand Bargain commitments; develop a better understanding of cooperating partnerships (CPs) across the region; enable RBN to initiate a strategic dialogue around cooperating partnerships with country offices (COs) during second-generation Country Strategic Plan (CSP) design; and inform RBN's gender-transformative approach to cooperating partnerships. Users of the results are expected to be interested in the operational performance and learning from CP management practices. The

evaluation's geographic scope encompasses nine WFP Country Offices (COs) supported by RBN: Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda.

### Key Findings

#### Relevance of WFP partners and partnership management practices

The shifts in partnership management practices have largely responded to corporate directions to streamline and standardize CP management processes. All COs introduced standard operating procedures (SOPs) for Field Level Agreement (FLA) management, established Cooperating Partner Committees, and committed to increased digitization and automation of due diligence processes by beginning their use of the UN Partner Portal (UNPP). WFP CP management practices and standards in the region have been aligned with principles of 'good' partnership; they have fostered collaboration guided by joint goals and characterized by transparency, accountability, and communication.

Fewer efforts have focused on increasing strategic partnerships with CPs, capacity strengthening of CPs, and ensuring a greater focus on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE). Gender and protection accountabilities in FLAs and other CP management tools represent a systematic effort to support gender-sensitive approaches to programming. WFP's integration of GEWE is most visibly operationalized through requirements about gender parity in partner organizations (staffing) and in the implementation of programme activities (among beneficiaries).

Overall, the mix of WFP CPs in the region is aligned with priorities outlined in CSPs and responds to evolving country contexts but does not yet reflect an intentional approach to engage more with local NGOs or with women's, women-led or GEWE-mandated organizations. WFP partnered with more local NGOs than international NGOs throughout 2016-2020, but channelled more funding to international NGOs. Although most COs have begun transitioning to multi-year FLAs, the continued use of short-term FLAs is not aligned with corporate directives or the needs of CPs, particularly local NGOs.

### Strengthening of partnership management approaches and partner capacities and performance

WFP's practices in CP selection have improved since 2016 and are seen as transparent, timely, and communicative. The introduction of the UNPP enhanced the clarity and efficiency of WFP's CP selection process. In other stages of the partnership management cycle, there have not yet been clear signs of improvements across all COs. Many WFP COs have partnered with the same CPs over a long period and have placed less emphasis on scoping prospective partners. Working with the same partners over time has allowed some COs to respond rapidly to emergency situations.

COs have increased regular monitoring and feedback and have documented CP performance through the Partner Performance Evaluation (PPE) tool and CP evaluation reports, but the frequency with which WFP shares feedback varies across COs. Common challenges for CPs during project implementation include delays in financial processes, payment disbursements, and commodity deliveries. CO efforts to strengthen CP management resulted in more standardized processes for CP selection, implementation and performance management, with less evidence of enhanced strategic engagement with CPs.

### Factors that influenced country office partnership management and partner capacities

CP management practices are influenced by several external factors at the country level related to external funding, country governance, number of NGOs in the partnership landscape, and evolving operational contexts. Apart from the launch of the UNPP, a positive step towards harmonizing due diligence processes for CP selection and contracting among UN agencies at the CO-level, there were few other initiatives to improve collaboration across UN agencies in CP management practices. More opportunities for collaboration will be forthcoming in 2022.

The establishment of CP management teams and the commitment of senior personnel allowed many COs to better address the transactional and strategic aspects of managing partnerships, although striking the right balance between these aspects remains a challenge. The establishment of a dedicated CP management team at the RBN allowed the bureau to increase its focus on strategic aspects of CP management. WFP HQ has developed tools, templates and guidelines, and has provided support on their implementation.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### Overall Assessment

By increasing standardization and placing greater emphasis on efficiency in partnership management, WFP has improved some key elements of CP management, especially related to risk management. WFP has begun a shift away from seeing CPs solely as delivery agents/contractors towards seeing them as partners in country-level strategic planning to achieve Zero Hunger. However, CP management practices and tools still lag behind some of the strategic thinking about cooperating partnerships.

WFP has not had a clear approach to strengthening the capacity of CPs. The new generation of CSPs provides an opportunity to clarify this approach, including how it is linked to broader WFP support to country capacity strengthening. WFP has made progress on Grand Bargain commitments overall, but has not yet clarified the implications of the localization agenda for Cooperating Partnerships and CP management. There is still unmet potential to link CP management with WFP's more gender-transformative agenda.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** WFP should develop a strategy that contains an intentional approach to how WFP will meet its commitments to the localization agenda in the Eastern Africa region

**Recommendation 2.** WFP should articulate a more intentional approach to drawing on CP management as a strategy for increasing capacity for gender transformative programming.

**Recommendation 3.** WFP should continue to harmonize partnership management processes with other UN agencies, and pursue strategic collaboration with other organizations aimed at capacity strengthening of CPs.

**Recommendation 4.** WFP COs should operationalize their intent to foster more strategic engagement of CPs.

**Recommendation 5.** WFP should institutionalize partnership management, including CP management, as a field of technical expertise that encompasses oversight on transactions of cooperating partnerships and strategic aspects of CP management

**Recommendation 6.** WFP should continue ongoing efforts to increase the digitization and automation of CP management processes at COs and Field Offices in the region. WFP should revisit the FLA template. WFP should further digitize CP management processes and explore possibilities of digitizing implementation processes.

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#### Reference:

Full and summary reports of the evaluation and the Management Response are available at <http://www1.wfp.org/independent-evaluation>

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