



Evaluation of the WFP's Policy on Peacebuilding in Transition Settings

CONTEXT

The WFP policy on the WFP's role in Peacebuilding in Transition Settings was issued in 2013, and its evaluation was initiated in 2021.

Food security and conflict intersect in several ways and WFP has long operated in environments characterized by conflict, fragility and violence. In 2020, 33 of the countries in which WFP operates ranked within a high conflict or conflict risk level, with twelve countries with ongoing United Nations peacekeeping missions. Food insecurity can also be a driver of conflict and humanitarian and development interventions can have both positive and negative effects on local peace and conflict dynamics.

In recent years, the humanitarian assistance discourse has increasingly emphasised the connections between humanitarian, development, and peace work - the "triple nexus". An evolving international agenda calls for development and humanitarian actors to seek a more active role in addressing root causes of conflicts. The 2020 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to WFP acknowledges efforts to combat hunger, contribute to improve conditions for peace, and efforts to prevent the use of hunger as a weapon of war.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

Prior to the 2013 peacebuilding policy, WFP had developed an approach centred around the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and operational independence. The policy aimed to clarify expectations for the WFP role in conflict, post-conflict and transition settings to ensure that WFP does not inadvertently contribute to conflict, but also leverages opportunities to contribute to peace, when appropriate.

Specifically, the policy introduced eight general principles for working in conflict contexts including: understanding the context; maintain an hunger focus; do no harm; support United Nations' efforts coherence; ensure inclusivity and equity and be realistic.

Alongside those overarching principles, the policy introduced three main policy directions namely (i) conducting conflict and risk analysis (ii) using conflict-sensitive programming and (iii)

working with peacebuilding partners encompassing strong two-way communication with affected people.

The evaluation aimed to explore the effects that the presence, programmes and interventions of WFP have on conflict and peace dynamics, relevance of policy implementation measures and enabling and hindering factors. It assessed the relevance, effectiveness, coherence and sustainability of the Policy and its implementation from 2012 to 2021. The overall approach and timeline were adjusted in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation served the dual objectives of learning and accountability. The primary target users of the evaluation results are WFP senior management, together with Executive Board members and the Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, which comprises the Emergencies and Transition Unit (PRO-P) as policy owner, as well as various thematic units and divisions responsible for emergencies and supply chain, vulnerability analyses, procurement, human resources, partnerships, as well as regional bureaux and country offices.

KEY EVALUATION FINDINGS

How good is the policy?

The policy is of relatively high quality except for the aspects concerning policy implementation and uptake. The policy remains relevant and coherent - internally and externally - setting realistic directions to guide the organisation in its approach to conflict sensitivity and contributions to peace as reflected in the current Strategic Plan.

There is limited need and interest in updating the policy. Minor changes could be made relating to: a broader scope for policy application; the inclusion of an explicit theory of change; a stronger link to gender and other cross-cutting issues; an updated reflection on changes in the external context.

Despite some initial measures taken in 2013, overall, policy implementation has been cautious and situation-specific with

limited financial and human resources allocated. Uptake only became more systematic several years later. Since 2017, the evaluation found more examples of policy implementation including promising, but limited investments in broadening the evidence base, capacity building, the establishment of a community of practice, practical operational support, process adaptations, and efforts to mainstreaming conflict sensitivity within the organization.

What are the results of the policy?

The results of the policy have been assessed at three levels:

- i) The evaluation notes limited achievements in terms of improved **conflict analysis**, practice of conflict-sensitive programming, and partnerships with peacebuilding organizations. WFP employees and cooperating partners are highly aware of the importance of doing no harm and recognise the reduction of food insecurity as WFP's main contribution to peace. However some blindspots remain in conflict settings such as WFP's influence on power relations, interactions with host governments and backgrounds or associations of employees cooperating partners and other stakeholders.
- ii) **Programme adaptations** mainly involved strengthening impartiality and programme quality but in limited instances also included facilitation of dialogue. WFP's main potential in contributing to peace is through reducing food insecurity, and mainly lies in contributing its core mandate and expertise in addressing food insecurity, in strengthening local food production by building local markets as part of broader stabilization or peacebuilding initiatives.
- iii) The **plausible effects on conflict and peace dynamics** are driven by increasing food availability and bringing conflicting groups together through programming. Targeting practices, specifically the perceived unfair exclusion of certain groups (such as those forcibly displaced) can be the primary driver of tensions in certain contexts. The affected people survey confirms they see a strong potential for WFP's actions to contribute to affecting conflict and peace dynamics. Secondary analysis from previous evaluations showed that the choice of cash-based or in-kind modalities can also have important positive or negative effects on local peace and conflict dynamics. Overall, the evaluation notes that WFP enjoys a strong reputation as a neutral actor.

What accounts for the results observed?

Factors that influence the current performance of WFP in conflict sensitivity and contribution to peace are mainly internal and relate to management buy-in, incentives, staffing, and the emergency focus and culture of WFP. Mixed messages on WFP's ambition on contribution to peace and limited corporate guidance constrained the policy implementation.

Important external factors identified include the relationship with cooperating partners, donor influence, and the relationship with and influence of host governments, especially in context where they are part of a conflict.

Internally, the institutional set-up and capacity for WFP work on conflict and peace have also changed, and aspects related to the peacebuilding policy are now featured in the WFP Strategic Plan (2022–2025).

Since the award the Nobel Peace Prize, WFP potential and efforts to contribute to peace have received greater attention

compared to the need to sustain and strengthen further the focus on avoiding to contribute to tensions and be conflict sensitive, which is considered – in line with the policy – a foundational objective.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

Delivering assistance in a conflict-sensitive way remains key to ensuring that WFP does no harm and works in a people-centred way. This is of particular importance as WFP has been increasing its focus on “changing lives” alongside “saving lives”, which entails greater engagement with national and local authorities, requiring a careful balancing with neutrality and impartiality.

The evaluation concludes that the policy is well formulated and remains relevant, and that WFP's main contribution to peace continues to be its work on food insecurity, resilience and livelihoods. However, gaps remain in conflict-sensitive programming, and in enhancing the practice and use of context and conflict analysis to inform programme and process adaptations.

If WFP can make progress on the priority issues identified in the evaluation, it can become a more conflict-sensitive organization because it already holds the other keys to making the shift work. Firstly, the peacebuilding policy remains relevant and provides an adequate and sufficient framework to orient WFP's work in conflict and post-conflict- and transition settings. Secondly, the country-based conflict advisers who have recently joined the organisation have the necessary expertise, though sufficient capacity in regional bureaux and headquarters to effectively support the peacebuilding policy uptake is needed. Thirdly, guidance documents, trainings and relevant partnerships arrangements exist; they only need to reach the right people within WFP and among cooperating partners.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Strengthen the practice of actionable, country-level analysis of how the presence and programmes of WFP and its partners influence conflict dynamics

Recommendation 2: Create incentives and take steps to adapt organisational culture to make conflict sensitivity more central: Clearly communicate expectations, integrate conflict sensitivity into standard monitoring tools and enhance incentives for Country Directors.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity in WFP programmes and processes with partners and contractors: Increase the focus on conflict sensitivity in the work with cooperating partners and check the backgrounds of employees, contractors and cooperating partners.

Recommendation 4: Alleviating food insecurity is and should remain the most important WFP contribution to peace. WFP should focus its contribution to peace to support existing peacebuilding processes: implementing activities jointly with other actors, drawing on WFP's core mandate strengths and focus on humanitarian access to alleviate food insecurity.