Evaluation Synthesis of WFP's Performance Measurement and Monitoring (2018–2021)

CONTEXT

There is growing demand for evidence-generation across WFP, and evaluation syntheses are part of the 'toolkit' to support evidence-based decision-making and respond to growing interest in and demand for succinct and actionable analysis.

Performance measurement and monitoring are guided by the WFP Normative Framework for Monitoring, first established in the WFP Corporate Monitoring Strategy 2015-2017. The original framework included four components: Corporate Result Framework, Business Rules, Standard Operating Procedures for Country Strategic Plan monitoring and Minimum Monitoring Requirements. Some of these key documents were updated in subsequent years in response to a range of emerging issues and demands, including relating to organizational restructuring and the need to update and expand WFP's corporate indicators to better capture new priorities and areas of focus.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE SYNTHESIS

The evaluation synthesis looked at 53 centralized and decentralized evaluations completed in the period 2018-2021. It asked seven synthesis questions (SQ, see Key Findings) to examine the extent to which WFP's Normative Framework for Monitoring allowed for effective measurement at country level and enabled corporate performance reporting. The synthesis also examined the extent to which WFP's monitoring systems generated credible information, and for which purposes, and whether and how cross-cutting priorities were reflected in monitoring practices.

OBJECTIVES AND USERS OF THE SYNTHESIS

The synthesis aims to contribute to WFP's global and regional evidence base, and support corporate decision-making in the short and medium term in the area of performance measurement and monitoring. Its intended users include primarily WFP's Corporate Planning and Performance Division (CPP) and the Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division (RAM) but also programme and policy owners, Regional Bureaux and Country Offices.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Do corporate outcome, output and cross-cutting indicators allow for effective measurement of intervention achievements at the country level?

Corporate outcome and output indicators allow WFP to aggregate data at the corporate level. However, they often fall short of enabling country offices to effectively measure and report on the full depth of intervention achievements at the country level over time.

2. To what extent have WFP's monitoring systems generated credible information? How has information generated by WFP monitoring systems been used, and by whom?

Evaluations tended to address the credibility of monitoring data if they found a shortcoming or challenges particularly in relation to monitoring frameworks, data gaps, data quality and disaggregation.

Over 90 percent of evaluations included in the synthesis sample recommended improvements to monitoring practice or systems. The evaluations did tend to focus more on identifying and explaining the reasons for shortcomings and areas for improvement, rather than documenting good practices.

In terms of use of monitoring data, the evaluations note a predominant use for reporting purposes – within WFP and to donors – compared to use for course-correction, programme adjustment, and feeding into documenting and sharing lessons.

Evaluations highlighted the need to expand qualitative data collection, analysis and reporting to contextualize WFP's achievements and to support WFP's ability to learn and adapt using monitoring information.

3. To what extent has WFP's Normative Framework for monitoring enabled WFP to track programme effectiveness and inform corporate performance reporting?

While some evaluations in the sample refer to the Corporate Result Framework, other components of WFP's Normative Framework were not directly discussed. Still, it was found that when the Standard Operating Procedures were followed, the monitoring systems performed well.

4. To what extent does the evaluative evidence provide learning on the three outcomes of the WFP Corporate Monitoring Strategy?

While no evaluations referenced directly the Corporate Monitoring Strategy, elements related to its three outcomes (i.e. (i) Adequate Monitoring Expertise; (ii) Financial Commitment; and (iii) Functional Capacity) were documented in more than half of the evaluations.

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Thirty percent of evaluations identified shortcomings in staffing levels and capacity, with only six percent assessing as sufficient the staffing levels allocated to the monitoring function. Evaluations rarely addressed the financial requirements for monitoring. When references were made, they pointed to a lack of funding as a hindering factor. Finally, with regards to the duties of staff allocated to monitoring, evaluations cited fragmentation and overburden.

5. What factors contributed to or hindered implementation of performance measurement and monitoring systems?

The evaluations highlight five set of factors that, depending on the context, could either contribute or hinder performance measurement and monitoring: 1) government engagement, 2) use of technology, 3) knowledge management, 4) donor reporting requirements, 5) and staff and financial resources. Moreover, with the exception for Country Capacity Strengthening (CCS) and resilience where challenges in measurement and use of indicators were mentioned, the evaluations showed no clear patterns linking activity categories with relative strength and weakness in monitoring.

6. To what extent is WFP's performance measurement system aligned with national monitoring systems? How has WFP pursued opportunities to strengthen national monitoring systems?

Evaluations documented WFP's overarching alignment with government priorities and plans, but rarely went into detail about alignment of WFP's performance measurement systems with national monitoring ones. Evaluations further noted that insufficient attention to strengthening national monitoring systems may undermine efforts for transitioning interventions and foster sustainability.

7. To what extent were cross-cutting issues (Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE), protection, accountability to affected population (AAP) and environment) reflected in monitoring practices, guidance and systems?

Of the four cross-cutting issues, GEWE was addressed most frequently. Evaluations found limited integration of GEWE indicators in monitoring frameworks and an over-reliance on quantitative data. They also noted how shortcomings in qualitative data collection and analysis, including at intra- and inter-household level have limited the ability to measure and analyse GEWE results appropriately, especially at the outcome level.

There is limited evidence across evaluations on how protection of affected people is covered through monitoring practices, guidance and systems beyond the need for improved indicators and additional data collection. Similarly, there is limited evidence generated through the evaluations also on AAP and environment in monitoring practices, beyond a few mentions of data availability, data use and gaps. Relating to AAP, several evaluations do discuss complaints and feedback mechanisms, but only few directly relate these mechanisms to quality and use of monitoring data for that specific purpose.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the synthesis finds that the WFP's Normative Framework for Monitoring continues to provide the necessary structure to support effective performance management and monitoring but does not encourage WFP to capture the breadth of its achievements or track them over time. While evaluations raised concerns around WFP's ability to track progress over time due to changes to the Normative Framework, these changes appear unavoidable in the short term while WFP moves towards establishing a better-fitting monitoring framework for the longer term.

The synthesis also notes that while the outcomes of the Corporate Monitoring Strategy remain relevant, there are opportunities for improvement around resourcing the monitoring function and making greater use of monitoring data for learning and programme adaptation beyond the more accountability-oriented use for reporting purposes.

The synthesis findings identify clear opportunities to improve the use of data for learning and adjustments. Representing relatively new types of monitoring efforts for WFP during the period of the evaluations, CCS and resilience emerged as specific new areas in need of additional development to better capture and monitor WFP's efforts and achievements.

The evaluations reviewed also provided strong evidence of the desire and need at both the country and corporate levels to expand and enhance qualitative data collection, analysis and reporting – especially for cross-cutting issues – to support learning and adaptation, pointing out that a focus on predominant quantitative measure and beneficiaries counting will continue to result in "hitting the target" but "missing the point".

Finally, the synthesis acknowledges that WFP is constantly working to improve its performance management and monitoring systems, and that steps have been taken and efforts are underway to address many of the weaknesses identified in the evaluations reviewed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the recent progress, the synthesis makes four recommendations that further complement and echo the findings from the 2018 Internal Audit of Monitoring in WFP, especially in relation to prioritizing the use of monitoring to inform decision-making and learning, investing staff capacities and skills for monitoring, and prioritizing resourcing for monitoring.

Recommendation 1.
Strengthen the resourcing and use of the monitoring function as an integral component of the programme cycle in support of learning objectives.

Recommendation 2.
Increase the use of qualitative data collection, analysis, and reporting to better capture, enhance understanding of, and learning from WFP's achievements.

Recommendation 3.
Provide enhanced support to improve Country Office monitoring systems based on the main threats to credibility identified in the synthesis.

Recommendation 4.
Provide enhanced support to improve country office monitoring systems based on the enabling factors identified in the synthesis.