



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

WFP EVALUATION

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

Targeting in emergencies

The number of food insecure and malnourished people in the world has seen an alarming increase over recent years as a result of conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate-related shocks. A growing number of people suffering from hunger in crises and emergencies are not receiving food assistance as the gap between humanitarian needs and available resources widens.

In this context, targeting of food assistance in emergencies has become a major concern of the World Food Programme (WFP) and other humanitarian actors. Targeting must help to ensure that as many people in need as possible are reached despite resource, access or capacity constraints (minimizing exclusion errors). And, at the same time, ensure that as little assistance as possible is distributed to the non-vulnerable (minimizing inclusion errors). Targeting can also lead to tensions between those who receive assistance and those who feel unfairly excluded. It is imperative, therefore, that targeting is based on an accurate determination of who should receive assistance, and, at the same time, maintain transparency and integrity throughout the process to ensure community acceptance [WFP, 2021. *Targeting and prioritization operational guidance note*]. When there are funding shortfalls, a further process of prioritization must ensure that the most vulnerable people within the targeted population are prioritized for assistance [*Prioritization falls outside the scope of this document and will be covered by another Summary of Evaluation Evidence*].

Commissioned by the WFP Office of Evaluation

13 KEY MESSAGES

1 Evaluation evidence. While an in-depth assessment of targeting is time-consuming and may not be the priority in every (emergency) evaluation, significant evidence gaps were found in all evaluations reviewed. These were particularly striking in the following areas: quality and relevance of vulnerability and needs assessments used; contextual and programmatic relevance, advantages and risks of targeting methods used; application of corporate and country-specific strategies, guidelines and standard operating procedures on targeting; capacity of WFP and its partners to conduct needs assessments or implement targeting according to WFP standards and guidance; quantitative assessment of exclusion and inclusion errors; and coverage of pockets of highly food insecure households or individuals in areas excluded by geographical targeting. These gaps were due to a combination of limited guidance on how to evaluate targeting, a dearth of formal documentation on assessments and targeting, high staff turnover in emergencies, and serious gaps in monitoring.

2 Guidance versus practice. While WFP guidance on vulnerability assessments and targeting presents a clear and relevant description of the different WFP standard types of assessments and targeting methods, the evaluations reviewed show how WFP country offices have customized assessments to their and their own partners' needs. They have adapted, mixed and matched targeting approaches to fit the context and constraints under which they were operating – often without really knowing all the consequences of their targeting choices because of insufficient context analysis and monitoring. It is also clear that WFP guidance is not yet fully applied in practice.

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3 Food security and vulnerability assessments used a wide range of data sources to identify needs across space and time. Where available, WFP relied on existing assessments and secondary data, and often collaborated with partners to conduct various food security and vulnerability assessment exercises. WFP was often appreciated by partners as a key provider of information on food security and nutrition in the country. However, some evaluations questioned the reliability of assessments conducted under particularly constrained conditions, pointing to the usefulness of remote technologies but also their limitations and risks. Evaluations mention few examples of needs assessments that applied a protection, gender and inclusion lens or that were focussed on particularly vulnerable groups such as women and girls and people with disabilities. Nutrition data was used for targeting, but was sometimes outdated and incomplete due to difficulties in collecting anthropometrics in areas with high access constraints.

4 Targeting approaches. According to WFP guidance on targeting [*WFP, 2021. Targeting and prioritization operational guidance note*], approaches can be classified in six large categories: geographic targeting, blanket targeting, categorical targeting (at individual or household level), community-based targeting, self-targeting and data-driven targeting. While all approaches (except blanket targeting) base eligibility on vulnerability to food insecurity and/or malnutrition, only community-based targeting, self-targeting and data-driven targeting are considered “vulnerability-based” targeting approaches by WFP. Country offices often layer, combine and adapt targeting approaches to best fit the local context and programme.

5 Geographic targeting was used by WFP almost everywhere to target assistance towards the most food insecure and vulnerable geographic areas in a country. This was often done using the consensus-based Integrated Food Security Phase (IPC) / Cadre Harmonisé (CH) classification of geographic areas by level of food and nutrition insecurity. Evaluations pointed at geographical coverage gaps due to access and capacity constraints and highlighted the importance of verifying or supplementing IPC / CH data through community consultations and complementary gender or protection assessments for a more nuanced and granular picture of vulnerability. Very few evaluations considered the possible consequences of geographic targeting which, by design, excludes all food insecure households living in geographical areas with a relatively lower percentage of food or nutrition insecure households. These pockets of highly food insecure households could somehow be assisted in another way, outside WFP assistance, but this was not verified by any evaluation reviewed. It points to the importance of good coordination between WFP with other humanitarian actors who operate in areas where WFP does not. In some countries, WFP decided to provide assistance to additional geographic areas not classified as “in crisis” by IPC or similar exercises, based on its own, complementary assessments.

6 Categorical targeting (frequently referred to as status-based targeting), where assistance is targeted to households or individuals that belong to easily identifiable social categories (refugees, children under 5, pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls, etc.), appears to be the most straightforward. WFP sometimes relied on lists provided by others, e.g. UNHCR for refugees or government agencies for IDPs, which were not always up-to-date, requiring regular verification to avoid targeting errors. Two evaluations recommend to further promote community-based or data-driven targeting in protracted crisis situations, instead of blanket or categorical targeting.

7 Evaluations show that **community-based targeting** can enhance ownership and buy-in of the affected population but also warn that it may reinforce existing power imbalances and discrimination within the community, bringing risks of abuse of power and marginalization of stigmatized individuals or groups. This highlights the importance of a good understanding of local social dynamics, regular verification, and adequate monitoring and feedback systems to identify and remedy issues early on.

8 Communication and consultation with affected populations. Many evaluations highlight the importance of two-way communication with affected populations and partners on targeting approaches and criteria, and six recommend improving it. Several evaluations highlight a lack of appropriate communication and consultation with affected populations on targeting decisions, leading to confusion, tensions or even outright violence.

9 Consultation and two-way communication with affected populations was found key to reduce possible **tensions arising from targeting decisions**. Tensions were due to a lack of clarity and communication of sometimes overly complex targeting mechanisms, and perceptions of unfairness and partiality in the selection of beneficiaries. WFP made efforts to enhance two-way communication and strengthen impartiality to avoid increasing intra- and inter-communal tensions, even if WFP’s understanding of community relations often remained superficial for sufficiently localised adaptations of targeting practices. Some evaluations also report community behaviours that helped attenuate tensions, for example by sharing of rations between targeted and non-targeted households during or after distributions.

10 Consultation and coordination with partners. WFP usually consulted with in-country partners on targeting approaches and criteria. However, several evaluations highlight disagreements or lack of understanding amongst humanitarian partners. One evaluation found that a lack of coordination between humanitarian actors led to significant targeting errors and two evaluations recommend increasing coordination efforts with partners on targeting approaches.

11 Capacity strengthening on targeting. Two evaluations recommend further strengthening national capacities (government and cooperating partners) on targeting. Several evaluations mention WFP efforts to strengthen the capacity of government partners on targeting in relation to joint food security assessments and monitoring, and support to national social protection systems. Capacity strengthening at times involved the transfer of digital technologies and data, and a few evaluations raised concerns about the protection of sensitive personal identifying information, in particular when data was handled by WFP's partners. In all cases, capacity strengthening was considered work in progress, with WFP still actively involved in supporting the national systems. High partner staff turn-over at times affected sustainability of capacity strengthening gains. Evaluations did not assess WFP efforts to build targeting capacities of its cooperating partners, even if this is critical as cooperating partners regularly implement targeting on behalf of WFP. Separating the cooperating partners involved in targeting from those involved in providing assistance is mentioned as good practice to avoid conflicts of interest.

12 Monitoring of targeting effectiveness. Monitoring of targeting, usually through post-distribution surveys and community feedback mechanisms, was not rigorous and systematic enough across all countries and activities, and four evaluations recommend strengthening monitoring and verification of targeting effectiveness. Current monitoring practice does not allow quantification of targeting errors. While individual targeting errors identified through complaints appeared to be rectified quite swiftly, no evaluation indicates that monitoring results had actually led to broader adjustments in targeting approaches and criteria.

13 Effectiveness of targeting. Exclusion errors were very common across the evaluations reviewed and three evaluations recommend giving greater attention to inclusion of the most vulnerable groups such as woman-headed households, people with disabilities and hard-to-reach populations. Causes for exclusion errors included crude targeting mechanisms, delays in registration, lags in updating beneficiary lists in contexts of increasing needs or population movements, technology access constraints and physical access constraints. Inclusion errors, which may indirectly lead to those more in need receiving no or less assistance, were created by social dynamics, power relations in the case of community-based targeting, imprecisions in government targeting systems, and duplication in assistance as a result of poor coordination amongst humanitarian actors.

BREADTH OF EVIDENCE

This summary is based on evidence extracted from 23 evaluation reports (see annex), sampled from 54 evaluations of WFP country strategic plans, corporate emergency responses, policies and strategic areas and inter-agency humanitarian evaluations, conducted between 2021 and 2023.

Evaluations were selected on the basis of evaluation coverage of emergency response activities, depth of the assessment of targeting approaches, and regional representation, as feasible. Data was extracted using an evidence matrix and then summarized across research questions.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in the map does not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever of WFP concerning the legal or constitutional status of any country, territory or sea area, or concerning the delimitation of frontiers.



1. [Evaluation of the Chad WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#)
2. [Evaluation of the Haiti WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#)
3. [Evaluation of the Kenya WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#)
4. [Evaluation of the Madagascar WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#)
5. [Evaluation of the Nigeria WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#)
6. [Evaluation of the Pakistan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#)
7. [Evaluation of the Sudan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#)
8. [Evaluation of the Algeria WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2022](#)
9. [Evaluation of the Burkina Faso WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#)
10. [Evaluation of the Central African Republic WFP Interim Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#)
11. [Evaluation of the Colombia WFP Country Strategic Plans 2017-2021 and 2021-2024](#)
12. [Evaluation of the South Sudan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#)
13. [Evaluation of the Tajikistan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2024](#)
14. [Evaluation of the Egypt WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#)
15. [Evaluation of the Jordan WFP Country Strategic Plan 2020-2022](#)
16. [Evaluation of the Nepal WFP Country Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#)
17. [Evaluation of State of Palestine WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#)
18. [Evaluation of the Philippines WFP Country Strategic Plan 2018-2023](#)
19. [Evaluation of the Policy on WFP's Role in Peacebuilding in Transition Settings](#)
20. [Strategic Evaluation of WFP's Use of Technology in Constrained Environments](#)
21. [Corporate Emergency Evaluation of WFP's Response in Myanmar 2018-2022](#)
22. [Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation of the COVID-19 Humanitarian Response](#)
23. [Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation \(IAHE\) of the Yemen Crisis](#)


WFP EVALUATION

 wfp.org/independent-evaluation

 wfp.evaluation@wfp.org

 @WFP_Evaluation

 Via Cesare Giulio Viola 68/70, 00148 Rome, Italy

 T +39 06 65131

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