



# Evaluation of WFP's Emergency Preparedness Policy (2017)

## SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation covers the 2017 WFP's policy on emergency preparedness. The policy has three primary objectives: i) to serve as a framework for emergency preparedness in all of WFP's work and at all levels; ii) to inform WFP's work with national and local governments, regional bodies and local communities, at their request and driven by their priorities; iii) to consolidate and expand mutually beneficial partnerships, including with international and national civil society entities and the private sector. The policy emphasizes a shift toward supporting national ownership in order to reduce the need for operational inputs from WFP and other actors. The evaluation assessed the quality and results of WFP's emergency preparedness policy and related practices, along with factors that enabled and hindered those results. It covered the period from 2017 until early 2024.

## OBJECTIVES AND USERS

The evaluation served the dual objectives of learning and accountability. The primary intended users are the Emergency Preparedness and Response Service, as the policy's owner, as well as other headquarter divisions, country offices, regional bureaux, the Executive Board, host governments, and other WFP partners.

## METHODOLOGY

This evaluation focused on three key questions:

- ❖ **How good is the WFP Emergency Preparedness Policy?**
- ❖ **What results has WFP achieved in the area of emergency preparedness (within and beyond the policy framework)?**
- ❖ **What has enabled or hindered the achievement of results from the Emergency Preparedness Policy and related practices?**

The data collection was conducted through key informant interviews, document reviews, and country case studies, including missions to Cuba, Pakistan, Togo, Ukraine and Zambia, remote data collection in Sudan, and desk reviews covering Burundi, Central African Republic, Iraq, Peru, the Philippines and Zimbabwe. A review of comparable organizations – the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Organization for Migration and the United Nations Children's Fund – also informed the analysis.

## KEY CONCLUSIONS

**Policy quality.** The Emergency Preparedness Policy is of moderately good quality and has framed and guided the development of WFP's various emergency preparedness work streams. It is evidence-based, was widely consulted upon and is coherent with WFP's strategic plans. It also aligns with Agenda 2030, Sendai, and World Humanitarian Summit commitments to national and local leadership and ownership of risk management, proactive data-driven planning, early warning and early action, and gender equity and inclusion.

However, clear commitments to generating evidence about the effectiveness of emergency preparedness were missing, and the absence of contextually adaptable indicators hampered WFP's capacity to monitor progress. Limited conceptual clarity in the policy has also hindered alignment with WFP work in other areas such as disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, and resilience-building.

Moreover, the policy's results have been hampered by the absence of a resourced strategy for implementation and learning. In particular, the policy did not include commitments to substantially increase resources for preparedness. It also did not articulate how internal and external coordination of efforts would take place.

**Responsibilities and leadership.** Responsibilities for emergency preparedness stipulated in the policy have been duly met across WFP, reflecting the cross-functional nature of emergency preparedness. Emergency preparedness has consistently featured among the strategic priorities established by senior management at headquarters, but oversight and accountability for results have been weak. The work of a dedicated team on emergency preparedness at headquarters has helped to catalyse progress. However, insufficient senior management leadership and accountability for emergency preparedness investments and results hindered progress, and a lack of coordination and guidance has led to fragmentation. The recently established HQ-based Preparedness Cell has shown promise in bringing together disparate parts of the organization in support of a limited number of country offices while improving coordination.

**Financial resources and staffing.** Inadequate funding and staffing have hindered implementation of the emergency preparedness policy. Access to adequate resources for preparedness activities was identified as a challenge within the policy itself. Seven years on, despite progress, overstretched and fragmented financial and human resources have continued to limit the ability of the organization to implement the policy.

WFP's corporate alert system has enabled it to prioritize resource allocations and prompted country offices to start urgent preparedness actions. Diverse mechanisms for accessing additional funding, stocks and surge personnel for emergency preparedness have enabled WFP to act quickly and flexibly. However, these have also resulted in a lack of coherence and oversight, as well as constraints in accessing advance financing mechanisms.

Despite promising practices in some areas, such as disaster risk financing and fundraising for anticipatory action, the organization has struggled to mobilize enough flexible and multi-year funding to enable it to invest in strengthening capacity for emergency preparedness over time, either for itself or for its partners. An insufficient evidence base for why WFP and its partners should invest in emergency preparedness, perpetuates the resourcing challenge, in the context of the growing gap between resources and needs.

In terms of staffing, WFP has increased the capacity of its personnel for emergency preparedness, early action and response, although gaps still exist. The effectiveness of surge capacity mechanisms is mixed, and their diversity and flexibility need to be balanced against calls for stronger coordination and oversight of deployments.

**Country capacity strengthening.** WFP has made substantial efforts to strengthen governments' and communities' capacity for emergency preparedness. Where long-term commitments are made by both parties, WFP has enabled governments to improve their emergency preparedness skills and capacity considerably, including in early warning, pre-positioning, supply chain, anticipatory action, macro risk insurance, shock-responsive social protection and other areas.

Limited use of the Emergency Preparedness Capacity Index, one of the key tools for measuring and supporting capacity strengthening in emergency preparedness designed by WFP, and a lack of consolidated information about the use of other tools with similar purposes, prevents a more complete assessment of WFP's efforts. Successes in emergency preparedness capacity strengthening at communities level exist but are often components of resilience building efforts and are not usually described in terms of preparedness.

**Comparative advantage.** WFP's demonstrated achievements in emergency preparedness are the result of deep knowledge and experience of the infrastructure, distribution systems and technology required for responding to emergencies; understanding of contextual risks and potential emergency scenarios; trusting and trusted partners; solution-driven staff focused on enhancing the capacity of others; and dedicated flexible funding. To scale up emergency preparedness, WFP needs to expand all these components, with more dedicated flexible funding and stronger internal prioritization of emergency preparedness across the organization at all levels.

**Efficiency and effectiveness.** WFP's investments in preparedness have enabled more timely responses, both in its own operations and by governments. Examples include the use of the Global Commodity Management Facility, investments in anticipatory action, strategic advance contracts and agreements. Nevertheless, there is ample room for improvement, as most emergency responses involve delays caused by critical gaps in preparedness at the national or subnational levels or gaps in donor resources and corporate-level advance financing.

WFP's preparedness measures in responses to diverse types of emergencies appears to be effective, but more robust evidence would strengthen the case for greater investments in

preparedness, which could in turn support resource mobilization. Finally, WFP has achieved mixed results in terms of institutionalization and community ownership of emergency preparedness. Recurrent challenges included lack of dedicated government financing and recurrent turnover in government personnel.

**Inclusiveness.** The evaluation identified some good practices in relation to the integration of gender and disability inclusion into emergency preparedness, showing that the engagement of women and women's organizations in preparedness activities is catalytic and contributes to the design of inclusive response strategies. They also show that disability-inclusive early warning increases the likelihood that persons with disabilities can take preventive action, evacuate and make risk-informed decisions.

However, there is limited evidence of systematic and coordinated efforts and results in those areas. For WFP to fully integrate a gender-sensitive approach and disability inclusion in preparedness work, a better understanding of the underlying inequalities that make certain groups more vulnerable to disaster and conflict-related emergencies is required as well as stronger partnerships with women's organizations.

**Partnerships.** Partnerships are central to WFP's approach to emergency preparedness, and the organization has made considerable contributions to collective preparedness efforts, either supporting national governments in their lead role or through the work of global clusters. WFP's common and on-demand services are a valuable contribution to system-wide emergency preparedness. However, partnerships have often been disparate and opportunistic, with partnerships aimed at strengthening preparedness with private sector entities, cooperating partners and development actors lacking any clear direction or rationale. Local partnerships to strengthen community-level preparedness, have received less strategic attention at the corporate level.

Quality partnerships clearly emerged as an enabling external factor for the achievement of results in the area of emergency preparedness. The evaluation stresses the importance of strong support from other United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations and private sector actors, both within and beyond the clusters, in the co-design and co-financing of emergency preparedness initiatives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1: Policy revision and implementation.** Update the policy through a participative exercise, and produce a strategy for its implementation.

**Recommendation 2: Financial resources.** Maximize available financial resources to increase access to funding and supplies for preparedness.

**Recommendation 3: Staffing.** Optimize emergency staffing by enhancing existing surge mechanisms, and invest in sustainable capacity development for staff in preparedness.

**Recommendation 4: Country capacity strengthening and support.** Support regional bureaux and country offices in strengthening national capacities for preparedness, leveraging partnerships.

**Recommendation 5: Learning and evidence.** Continue to apply WFP's strengths and comparative advantages to emergency preparedness, seeking out and maximizing opportunities for learning and generating new evidence.