



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Evaluation of WFP's Environmental Policy

CONTEXT

There are several external and internal factors that have driven WFP's approach to environmental sustainability and the development of the environmental policy:

- Growing evidence on the environmental impact of humanitarian and development activities affects people's livelihoods and well-being.
- International agreements on environmental sustainability and increasing global alignment on how to manage environmental risks.
- Recognition of the tensions between addressing immediate emergency needs and long-term environmental and social sustainability considerations.
- Increasing weight placed on environmental sustainability in WFP including a shift towards environmental and social sustainability as reflected in the progression of WFP's strategic plans.

SUBJECT AND FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

The Environmental Policy (2017) has five objectives: 1) enhancing the sustainability of activities and operations; 2) managing risks and maximizing the environmental opportunities of activities and operations; 3) minimizing the carbon footprint and increasing the resource efficiency of activities and operations; 4) aligning WFP's approach with global standards and international practice and 5) strengthening the understanding and capacities of partners and WFP stakeholders.

Three tools were established to implement the policy and to explicitly align with the UN Framework for Environmental and Social Sustainability: 1) environmental standards; 2) environmental risk screening and categorization ('Safeguards'); and 3) the environmental management system (EMS).

OBJECTIVES AND USERS

The evaluation served the dual objectives of learning and accountability. The primary intended users of the evaluation are: i) the Climate and Resilience Service (PPGR) which is within the Programme Policy and Guidance Division; ii) the Infrastructure and Facilities Management Branch (MSDI), which is within the Workplace and Management Department. The evaluation also aims to be useful to the Supply Chain and Delivery Division. Equally, the evaluation is relevant to the many staff members based in the country offices and regional bureaux and may also be of interest to external stakeholders, especially the donors, governments and external cooperating partners that WFP works with.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

1. Rationale and approach to environmental and social sustainability. The policy sets out a clear rationale for taking a systematic approach to environmental and social sustainability. At the same time, WFP is laying strong foundations to better understand its environmental performance and inform decision making. However, WFP's focus on applying the safeguards and EMS has detracted from the policy's broader vision, objectives and principles, undermining the extent to which environmental and social sustainability is being addressed systematically across WFP.

Policy vision. The policy provides a high-level vision to integrate environmental sustainability in the design and implementation of all WFP operations. It provides a good guiding intention, set of principles and objectives as a foundation for the organization's efforts to improve environmental sustainability.

Focus of policy implementation. The tools selected to support policy implementation were limited in scope and application. For example, although Safeguards standards and screening are applicable to "all [WFP] activities and operations," they are tightly focused on risk management rather than broader environmental sustainability considerations. The EMS tool is framed as a high-level method and set of principles for analyzing and addressing environmental sustainability, however its application has been restricted to in-house operations (WFP facilities management) rather than WFP operations such as logistics or food procurement, which often have a heavier footprint.

The focus on and allocation of resources to Safeguards and EMS has resulted in these tools becoming synonymous with the policy. The split in institutional ownership of the policy has only strengthened that perception: the PPGR leads on Safeguards while the MSDI leads on EMS. Policy-related collaboration between the MSDI and the supply chain division has been based upon good interpersonal relationships: but there is no institutionalized connection, and hence the broader policy vision and objectives. Notwithstanding, the recent process of developing the Environmental Plan of Action (EPACT), led by MSDI, is helping to deepen the involvement of more operational areas (e.g. supply chain) in the environmental policy's delivery.

2. Integration of social dimensions of sustainability. Social dimensions of sustainability have not been adequately incorporated into policy implementation.

Social sustainability standards. The policy was focused on environmental sustainability, placing it at odds with *the Framework for advancing environmental and social sustainability in the UN system* which emphasizes the connection between social and environmental sustainability. The Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework (ESSF) elaborated environmental and social standards, but this has been poorly "cascaded" down to policy implementation approaches. Commitment to environmental and social sustainability remains largely at a conceptual rather than

programmatic level, with missed opportunities to maximize environmental benefits and avoid or mitigate risks to people in vulnerable situations.

3. Staffing and capacity for policy implementation. The presence of policy-focused teams at headquarters, regional bureaux and country offices, including focal points, has been essential to achieving progress in implementing the policy. However, challenges with temporary staffing and limited resourcing have compromised the sustainability of the policy and its results.

Resources, complementarity, and accountability. While the policy did not detail the institutional, human, and financial resource requirements for implementation, the ESSF specifies tools, processes, resources, and institutional ownership for operationalizing the policy. However, important gaps remain, particularly, regarding funding sources, how the policy should work alongside existing functions and tools (especially those relating to social standards), and accountability mechanisms for Safeguards. The absence of a higher-level lead or champion for the environmental policy, its split divisional ownership, and the policy being equated with the tools, have undermined WFP's efforts to implement the broader policy vision, objectives, and principles.

Support to country offices. WFP has established structures for implementing both the Safeguards and EMS, with support from headquarters, regional bureaux, and country office focal points. However, this institutional support has been largely reliant upon consultant positions rather than staff. The recent organizational restructuring has reduced the number of regional advisors for both Safeguards and EMS by approximately 50 percent across the regional bureaux. Country offices identify focal points for Safeguards and EMS but do not consistently have the required expertise, and time to take on these responsibilities alongside their other core tasks.

Capacities of national government and cooperating partners. Government partners and NGO cooperating partners face the same resource, capacity and expertise limitations as WFP. A degree of training has been undertaken with partners, but this has mostly been focused on Safeguards and associated screening processes. However, lack of in-country capacity, specifically, the absence of firms or consultants with the requisite technical experience, remains a constraint even though the great majority of governments and cooperating partners appreciate the value of Safeguards and are supportive of WFP's efforts to establish a Safeguards system.

4. Achievement of policy results. While efforts to meet the five environmental policy objectives are still at an early stage, some progress has been made towards each objective. An overview of progress towards the five policy objectives is presented in table 1. Further details are set out in conclusion 4a and 4b.

Table 1: Summary Assessment of Progress Against Environmental Policy Objectives

Policy objective	Summary assessment of progress against objective
Enhancing environmental sustainability	Enhanced environmental sustainability of WFP facilities. However, substantial aspects of WFP operations not covered
Managing risks	Safeguards in place but not systematically applied
Minimizing carbon footprint and increasing resource efficiency	EMS reduced carbon intensity – only applied to facilities. Efforts by WFP's supply chain to better understand WFP's broader carbon footprint
Alignment with global standards	Safeguards and EMS are well aligned with global standards – some gaps for safeguards
Strengthening capacities	Safeguards training with partners systematic capacity development not in place

4a. Application of Safeguards. It is too early to determine the extent to which WFP's Safeguards have enhanced the environmental and social sustainability of its programming. WFP has designed a Safeguards model that is generally consistent with models applied by other entities. However, its implementation has been limited and unsystematic, which, given the need to comply with donor requirements, could limit WFP's ability to maintain existing – and access new – funding streams.

Adoption of the International Finance Institution (IFI) model. The Safeguards model aligns with IFI standards and donor requirements. There is a skew towards implementing Safeguards for development-focused work, and very little work undertaken to embed or even explore the potential application of Safeguards within emergency contexts, which, given the need to comply with donor requirements, could affect WFP's ability to access funding streams.

4b. Implementation of the Environmental Management System. WFP's approach to its EMS is well-structured, generally aligns with global best practices and is yielding early positive results. However, the approach does not consider social sustainability and the work has only covered a small part of WFP's overall environmental footprint. There are opportunities for WFP to further engage with partners and governments to leverage WFP's work on environmental management systems.

Reporting through the interagency Greening the Blue report, demonstrates a positive trajectory for WFP's environmental performance. Although total emissions increased between 2017 and 2022, emissions per staff member are trending slightly downwards and WFP's waste generation has decreased dramatically, linked to improved waste management practices.

5. Policy Monitoring and Reporting Framework. Policy monitoring processes are inadequate. They do not measure progress effectively and are not capable of supporting policy related decision making. However, other mechanisms – most notably, "Greening the Blue" and the forthcoming EPACT – provide a sound basis upon which to build future monitoring.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: WFP should establish a stronger approach and governance structure to ensure that environmental and social sustainability issues are systematically addressed across the organization.

Recommendation 2: WFP leadership should ensure that safeguards are applied across all country strategic plan activities.

Recommendation 3: Improve the extent to which environmental and social sustainability is addressed by the EMS and broaden the application of EMS.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen the monitoring of environmental and social sustainability across WFP.