



KEY LESSONS

Strategic Joint Evaluation of the Collective International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020-2022)

WHAT A **strategic joint evaluation** of how the international development and humanitarian communities responded collectively to the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHO The flagship evaluation is a unique, global effort. More than 60 evaluation units worked together under the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, led by the OECD/DAC, Development Co-operation Directorate, Evaluation Unit. WFP's Office of Evaluation played an active role as a member of the Coalition steering group.

WHEN Published in 2025, the evaluation covered the period January 2020 to December 2022.

WHERE It was global in scope – the evaluation looked at collective international assistance, crossing multiple countries and humanitarian and development contexts.

HOW The evaluation followed a modular, non-experimental case-based approach. It draws on case studies, interviews with key informants, a synthesis of evaluation reports, and analysis of international finance flows.

WHY A rare system-wide perspective assessing how effective, relevant and coordinated the international development and humanitarian COVID-19 response was. Operating in an unexpected crisis mode surfaced both effective and less effective ways of working together. It pushed organizations to innovate, adapt quickly and coordinate actions. While exceptional in many ways, the learning from the COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity for WFP to be better prepared for future global health, or similar, crises.

1 The evaluation highlights the importance of **coordination across humanitarian and development actors**. For WFP this underlines the value of its dual role (emergency food assistance plus longer-term resilience/development programming) and the **need to strengthen links between its humanitarian operations and development partnerships**.

2 The pandemic response exposed both **adaptive capacities** (such as flexible delivery models and quick digital uptake) and **gaps in operational systems** (supply chains, cash & voucher modalities, staff safety, digital platforms). This mirrors a broader lesson from the COVID-19 response: systems that were able to adapt rapidly under crisis conditions, were better positioned to sustain essential services. For WFP this suggests continuing to invest in supply chain, flexible delivery models (including cash-based transfers) and digital tools so that when the next large-scale shock hits, WFP is better prepared.

3 The evaluation emphasises **relevance to context** – ensuring responses match evolving needs rather than predetermined plans. For WFP, this means further **embedding context-sensitive programming** (conflict, climate, displacement) and strengthening real-time monitoring (food security, market systems) so responses remain aligned with needs.

4 A key theme was **linking humanitarian assistance to longer-term development outcomes**. For WFP, this finding supports continued investment in resilience building, climate adaptation, social protection and linking emergency food assistance to sustainable livelihood programmes.

5 The evaluation indicates that assistance is more effective and scalable when **financial instruments are tailored to country-specific needs and contexts**, with a deliberate prioritisation of cost-effective modalities. In practice, this includes greater use of budget support by OECD/DAC members, and cash-based transfers in the case of WFP.

6 The report also underlines the importance of **accountability and learning in crisis responses**. For WFP, it reinforces the need to continue documenting and evaluating its responses (both emergency and development) to derive lessons, improve operations and demonstrate value to donors and partners.

7 Finally, given the scale and global nature of the pandemic, the evaluation emphasizes that **global preparedness matters**. For WFP, this reinforces its role in global early-warning systems, anticipatory action, pre-positioning, and being ready to scale rapidly when global shocks hit.