

EVALUATION SYNTHESIS OF WFP'S ENGAGEMENT IN HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

FULL REPORT

SUMMARY REPORT

WFP EVALUATION

WHY THIS SYNTHESIS?

Humanitarian needs are rising dramatically, while funding for humanitarian assistance keeps declining. Initiatives such as UN80 and the humanitarian reset are driving major systemic changes. Efficient, coordinated and collective humanitarian action is therefore not just a pressing need, but a transformative imperative.

Conducted by WFP's Office of Evaluation, the synthesis draws on 65 independent evaluations carried out since 2018 to assess WFP's role, strengths and challenges in relation to humanitarian coordination and to inform WFP's positioning within the humanitarian system.

The synthesis posed four questions:

- 1 How has WFP positioned itself in humanitarian coordination forums?
- 2 What contributions has WFP made to humanitarian coordination?
- 3 What difference has WFP's engagement made to coordinated humanitarian action on the ground?
- 4 What factors have supported or constrained WFP's engagement in humanitarian coordination?

The synthesis covers WFP engagement in UN humanitarian coordination mechanisms, including the humanitarian clusters under the Inter-Agency Standing Committee model, where activated, and their related results. The study also covered WFP's engagement in sectoral working groups and humanitarian country teams, its approach to coordination and collaboration with other humanitarian actors, and the services it provides to partners in support of the collective response.

WHAT DID IT FIND?



WFP's coordination role improved humanitarian access, efficiency and the quality of collective responses



Where WFP has no formalized coordination role, sometimes its engagement is opportunistic/individualized



WFP tends to prioritize the humanitarian imperative when trying to balance the serving of those in need with the demands of coordination



There is potential to use WFP's size and weight to help improve wider coordination



WFP's strong capacity in evidence generation strengthens humanitarian responses but there is scope to improve dissemination



Support for localization should be strengthened



More progress needed on collective transitioning out of emergency response operations

April 2026



WFP/Aurore Vinot

KEY INSIGHTS



WFP's coordination role improved humanitarian access, efficiency and the quality of collective responses

WFP has effectively leveraged its designated role as cluster lead or co-lead to lead the broader humanitarian system in emergency responses around the world.

Where roles are formally designated and clearly defined, WFP demonstrated the leadership, decisiveness and operational weight to mobilize, coordinate and deliver assistance where few other organizations can. Its agility, timeliness, responsiveness and capacity to meet urgent needs are widely documented.

WFP's leadership of the logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters, and its co-leadership of the food security cluster, position it as a central enabler of coordinated emergency response.

WFP advanced collective preparedness through tools, partnerships and capacity assessments, though preparedness was not always prioritized, and sometimes resources were overstretched.



Where WFP has no formalized coordination role, sometimes its engagement is opportunistic/individualized

In settings where WFP's role is less clearly defined or where it operates as a team member, its engagement was context-specific and opportunistic – a positive – but also at times individualized.

In some areas, it stepped in to take the lead, driven by the humanitarian imperative – especially where partners lacked capacity or ability to respond. This supported the operational response – but without sufficient consultation, risked undermining the sense of shared coordination.

For coordination beyond its formally designated cluster leadership/co-leadership role, challenges included confusion in responsibilities for multi-purpose cash assistance, and a sometimes reactive approach to partnerships.



WFP tends to prioritize the humanitarian imperative when trying to balance the serving of those in need with the demands of coordination

Evaluations showed how WFP frequently confronts and needs to navigate acute dilemmas when trying to address the humanitarian imperative to respond to human suffering, while balancing the demands of often complex coordination mechanisms.

Evaluations record that WFP tends to attempt a coordinated approach at first, but not at the risk of delaying the delivery of assistance to people in need.



There is potential to use WFP's size and weight to help improve wider coordination

WFP enjoys strong credibility in coordination, though limited communication on its decisions sometimes strained partnerships. Coordination was at times constrained by scarce, unpredictable funding and high staff turnover, undermining sustained, effective engagement.

Although WFP's scope to engage in coordination depends on the wider enabling environment, WFP could use its strong reputation with partners and its operational size and weight more consistently to help improve the broader coordination system.



WFP's strong capacity in evidence generation strengthens humanitarian responses but there is scope to improve dissemination

WFP's contributions to data, information sharing and analysis are of core value to humanitarian action, globally and in countries. They are highly valued by WFP's partners for their quality, comprehensiveness and rigour.

WFP's evidence generation and joint analysis strengthened collective responses by improving prioritization and reach to vulnerable groups.

However, evaluations found room to improve their dissemination – which in turn will support anticipatory action and strategic planning, as part of a proactive contribution to the work of the broader humanitarian community.



Support for localization should be strengthened

WFP's engagement in collective preparedness and capacity strengthening for response demonstrably supported localization. However, stronger alignment with these goals could deepen local ownership and make interventions more sustainable.

Collective efforts on strengthening capacity, in which WFP played an important role, equipped national and local actors to lead future responses independently. This reduced reliance on externally delivered humanitarian responses. However, government engagement in coordination was sometimes limited.



More progress needed on collective transitioning out of emergency response operations

WFP is fostering strategic collaboration to support early recovery, rehabilitate food systems and rebuild livelihoods. Its ability to pivot effectively to recovery programming is widely recognized.

However, clearer frameworks and early collective planning will help WFP more consistently link its immediate food assistance to longer-term collective resilience programming and system strengthening.



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WHAT SHOULD WFP DO?

1

To better support country-level decision making on engagement in humanitarian coordination, and in accordance with the ongoing humanitarian reset and the UN80 initiative, **clarify and prioritize – at the corporate level – WFP's role in coordination** mechanisms and forums beyond the clusters that it currently leads.

2

To maximize WFP's potential for enhancing the wider humanitarian system, **create a narrative for the WFP workforce that positions humanitarian coordination as a fundamental requirement**, while preserving space for independent action where the humanitarian imperative demands.