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Management response to the annual evaluation report for 2019

Introduction

1. This document presents management's response to the fourth annual evaluation report produced by the Office of Evaluation (OEV) in line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021).¹
2. Management notes OEV's continued commitment to an effective and efficient evaluation function, considering the key role that the evaluation function plays in supporting organizational learning, accountability, transparency and overall performance and results.
3. Management also notes the progress made by OEV in line with WFP's strategic direction and trends in its operating environment. In this regard management highlights the overview of centralized and decentralized evaluations completed, conducted and planned in 2019 and 2020; the performance of the WFP evaluation function; and the alignment of the evaluation function with organizational strategic goals.
4. Management values the content of the annual evaluation report and acknowledges the importance of presenting the outlook for the evaluation function and highlighting areas for attention in the coming years.

¹ WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1.

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5. Management's response refers specifically to the key evaluation-related efforts and achievements that supported evidence-based decision making in 2019, the strengthening of the WFP knowledge base and accountability in the following three areas, which reflect the structure of the report:
 - I. WFP evaluations for evidence-based decision making, considering the strategic direction of WFP and trends in the broader operating context;
 - II. The overall performance of the WFP evaluation function;
 - III. The further development of the evaluation function and areas highlighted for attention in coming years.

I. WFP evaluations for evidence-based decision making

6. Management welcomes the use of evaluation evidence in key areas, in particular to inform policy development, to strengthen emergency response and to inform country strategic plans (CSPs), as well as in the mid-term review of the WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021). Decentralized evaluations and planned impact evaluations have contributed to improved learning and accountability at the country level, and all regional bureaux have made noteworthy efforts to support cross-regional learning.
7. The programme of centralized evaluations, which is designed to be as relevant as possible to WFP's dynamic programming, is balanced in terms of its distribution across the Strategic Plan. Seventeen evaluations were completed or ongoing in 2019, with one impact evaluation window ongoing and another initiated in WFP priority areas: cash-based transfers and gender; and climate change and resilience.
8. Management, in view of the expansion of safety nets, notes the strategic relevance of the evaluation of the update of WFP's safety nets policy,² which was presented to the Executive Board at its 2019 annual session and has led to the development of a draft social protection strategy.
9. The evaluation of WFP's People Strategy³, initiated in 2018, was presented to the Board at its 2020 first regular session. Management recognizes the importance of that evaluation for creating a more people-centred organization and taking into account the findings of the external review of workplace culture and the ethical climate at WFP.⁴ The evaluation of the Gender Policy (2015–2020),⁵ initiated in 2019, will be presented to the Board at its 2020 annual session.
10. Management acknowledges OEV's participation in the policy cycle task force (PCTF) recently established by the Director of the Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division in 2019, which represents an opportunity for WFP to optimize learning in relation to policy evaluations.

² WFP/EB.A/2012/5-A.

³ "WFP People Strategy: A People Management Framework for Achieving WFP's Strategic Plan (2014–2017)". WFP/EB.1/2020/5-B.

⁴ Willis Towers Watson. 2019. "External Review of Workplace Culture and Ethical Climate at World Food Programme". <https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000108824/download/>.

⁵ WFP/EB.A/2015/5-A.

11. Management takes note of the strategic evaluations carried out on topics central to the WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021).⁶ The strategic evaluation of WFP's capacity to respond to emergencies⁷ was presented to the Board at its 2020 first regular session. Recognizing emergency response as a WFP leadership priority, the evaluation examined WFP's work since 2011, covering a period of substantial growth in the number, complexity and duration of humanitarian crises. Its recommendations provide management with valuable feedback for ongoing and future emergency operations.
12. Two strategic evaluations were ongoing in 2019 and will be presented to the Board in 2020. The first focuses on the funding of WFP's work, where reducing the gap between resources and needs remains a priority for the organization and shortages of funds compared to needs are a longstanding issue. The second evaluation concerns the contribution of school feeding to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting the increased focus on school meals in the WFP leadership's priorities for the period 2017–2022; it will assess the relevance of WFP's current school feeding policy⁸ and its results will inform the implementation of the new school feeding strategy for the period 2020–2030 and, potentially, the development of a new school feeding policy.
13. Country strategic plan evaluations (CSPEs) are required in the penultimate year of implementation of CSPs. They provide for accountability and learning and are designed to feed into the CSP development process. Five CSPEs are progressing as planned and will be finalized in the first quarter of 2020. Management appreciates the flexibility of OEV in rescheduling evaluations in response to changing circumstances, such as when WFP expands a response, as in the case of the Rohingya emergency, or and when a CSP or interim CSP (ICSP) cycle is shortened or extended to align it with the programmatic cycle of a United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework (UNSDCF) and, hence, inform the formulation of a new CSP.
14. Management values the contribution of corporate emergency response evaluations, which assess the coverage, coherence and connectedness of WFP responses. The evaluation of the WFP Level 3 emergency response in northeastern Nigeria⁹ was presented to the Executive Board in November 2019. Well received and appreciated by the Board and by management, it has informed the development and implementation of the first CSP for Nigeria, covering the period 2019–2022, and provided information for the design and delivery of future corporate responses. Three emergency-response-oriented CSPEs were commenced in 2019, for Cameroon (Level 2), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Level 3) and the Bangladesh Rohingya refugee crisis (Level 3).
15. Management recognizes OEV's continued investment in inter-agency humanitarian evaluations (IAHEs).¹⁰ These evaluations contribute to ensuring evaluative coverage of WFP corporate emergencies efficiently through assessment of collective inter-agency action. An inter-agency evaluation of the drought response in Ethiopia was completed in 2019, and a

⁶ WFP/EB.2/2016/4-A/1/Rev.2.

⁷ "Summary report on the strategic evaluation of WFP's capacity to respond to emergencies (2011–2018) (WFP/EB.1/2020/5-A).

⁸ "Revised School Feeding Policy" (WFP/EB.2/2013/4-C).

⁹ WFP/EB.2/2019/6-A.

¹⁰ Inter-agency humanitarian evaluations are managed by a steering group composed of the following agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Population Fund, WFP and the World Health Organization; the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action, InterAction and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response.

United Nations system-wide scaling up of the humanitarian response to Cyclone Idai in Mozambique will be completed in 2020. In addition, the first thematic IAHE, on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, was launched in 2019.

16. The first synthesis of WFP country portfolio evaluations in the Sahel and Horn of Africa¹¹ was finalized and presented to the Executive Board at its 2019 annual session. The evaluation covered eight countries and management and Board members expressed appreciation for the recommendations and findings, saying that they were relevant and applicable to all regions where WFP was operating. A new synthesis of policy evaluations to be presented to the Board at its 2020 annual session will provide information from which the PCTF can draw lessons.
17. Management notes the finalization in 2019 of an impact evaluation strategy covering both centralized and decentralized evaluations. A two-year pilot implementation phase began in 2019, and OEV has formalized a partnership with DIME, the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation research group, to support WFP impact evaluations and relevant capacity building.
18. Management also appreciates OEV's offer to undertake priority impact evaluations on behalf of other WFP offices and to ensure that the evidence generated by such evaluations contributes to organizational learning.
19. OEV continues to participate in joint evaluations and partnerships, including by identifying areas of collaboration such as joint decentralized evaluations, impact evaluations and capacity development. Management welcomes the preparations under way for a joint evaluation of Rome-based agency collaboration.
20. Management recognizes that the number of decentralized evaluations started every year during the first three years of the evaluation policy substantially exceeded the original projections made in early 2016. Since 2016 sixty-one decentralized evaluations have been completed, with 25 initiated in 2019 and 18 completed. While the demand for decentralized evaluations remains high, the number initiated each year is expected to stabilize. Management also values the continued work of OEV and regional evaluation officers in supporting country offices to ensure that decentralized evaluations address their main learning needs and inform decision making.
21. Management notes that the number of country offices that have conducted at least one decentralized evaluation varies considerably from region to region; however, progress in meeting the coverage norms for decentralized evaluations is expected in 2020 in view of current plans for decentralized evaluation by country offices that have not yet undertaken them.
22. Management appreciates the engagement of headquarters divisions in generating evidence through decentralized evaluations and the efforts of regional bureaux in leading work to improve operational performance through knowledge management and the use of evaluation findings.
23. Decentralized evaluation coverage does not extend to all programme areas of WFP's programme of work. Management recognizes that regional bureaux and regional evaluation units identify priorities for decentralized evaluations in line with their regional evaluation strategies and in consultation with country office management. The range of themes to be covered by decentralized evaluations is expected to broaden, with increasing attention to smallholder agriculture market support, emergency preparedness, climate adaptation and asset creation and livelihood support.

¹¹ WFP/EB.A/2019/7-C.

II. Performance of the WFP evaluation function

24. The overall trend in major developments in the WFP evaluation function is positive. Given the increasing number of centralized and decentralized evaluations, management has supported the OEV change management process initiated in 2018 to ensure flexible, scalable management of evaluations and to realize the ambitions set out in the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021). The change management process was completed in December 2019, in time for the start of the implementation of the 2020 workplan.
25. Management appreciates the joint work of OEV and the Performance Management and Reporting Division since 2018 to strengthen the WFP monitoring and evaluation workforce, recognizing that such collaborative engagement is important for assessing and filling monitoring and evaluation staffing gaps. The monitoring and evaluation Future International Talent (FIT) pool initiative, in coordination with the Human Resources Division, was in 2019 tasked with responding to the demand from all levels of the organization for a stable and competent global workforce. The successful collaboration undertaken in response to that demand should continue in order to further enhance operating models and synergies between functional areas.
26. Following WFP's organizational restructuring in 2019, with the field monitoring function incorporated into the Research, Assessment and Monitoring Division, management appreciates OEV's commitment to continued collaboration to ensure that monitoring and evaluation requirements are met at the regional bureau and country office levels.
27. Management welcomes the development in 2019 of two new strategies for further supporting the implementation of the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021). WFP published its first impact evaluation strategy, for 2019–2026, which aims to promote the use of impact evaluations as an evidence-generating, organizational learning tool. In addition, an evaluation capacity development (ECD) strategy developed by OEV to ensure a comprehensive, coherent and targeted approach to internal ECD at WFP is due to be finalized and rolled out in early 2020. Management also anticipates that the implementation of the communication and knowledge management strategy, which commenced in 2019, will ensure that evaluation results are accessible and fully utilized for learning and accountability across WFP.
28. Management appreciates OEV's approach to CSP evaluation, which is aligned with the revised evaluation criteria of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and provides support to ensure that evaluation evidence is captured in the design of second-generation CSPs.
29. Management also acknowledges the establishment by OEV in 2019 of an analysis and research unit to ensure that evaluation teams have access to relevant data in WFP data sets and to enhance efficiency in the management of evaluations.
30. On the resourcing of the evaluation function, especially in view of the increasing number of decentralized evaluations among other things, management recognizes the value of maintaining the Contingency Evaluation Fund as a stop-gap mechanism for country offices that have budgeted for planned decentralized evaluations but nevertheless face funding shortfalls. Moreover, management continues to support the cross-divisional task force set up in 2018 to develop a strategic approach to ensure sustainable financing for the evaluation function, especially at the country and regional levels. Management also notes the positive experience with OEV's approach to coordinating the preparation of a consolidated regional investment case from 2018 through 2019. Management further notes that the overall financial resources for the evaluation function have almost tripled since 2016, in line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) target of dedicating 0.8 percent of WFP's total contribution income to the evaluation function by 2021.

31. Management acknowledges the conclusions of the annual evaluation report with regard to evaluation coverage in 2019 and the development of minimum coverage norms to ensure that decentralized evaluations are planned and conducted on the basis of existing evidence needs, with a clear purpose and in a manner that complements other evaluations carried out within the framework of the CSP cycle. It is noted that the challenges related to the alignment of CSPs with UNSDCFs have had an impact on OEV's ability to conduct some evaluations; this should be resolved over time, however.
32. On the quality of evaluations, an independent assessor concluded that 78 percent of the 18 evaluations completed in 2019 met or exceeded requirements. As to gender integration, it is noted that 86 percent were deemed to meet requirements and 14 percent to "approach" requirements.
33. Noting the contribution of evaluation findings to CSP/ICSP formulation, management acknowledges the continued increase in 2019 in the use of evaluation evidence in programme design and long-term adjustments. Management also appreciates the efforts of OEV and regional evaluation units to increase the accessibility of evaluation results, as well as OEV's engagement and joint learning activities with the wider evaluation, development and humanitarian communities.
34. Management recognizes the positive trend in the number and variety of joint initiatives and partnerships, noting that such collaborative engagements, particularly in the context of United Nations reform and SDG targets, are important instruments for assessing the effectiveness of joint approaches in achieving results. This trend should be sustained in order to foster coherence and synergies among United Nations agencies and government partners, and management looks forward to hearing more about the results and impact of such collaboration.
35. Management appreciates the continued implementation of regional evaluation strategies, including through the engagement of regional evaluation officers, in cooperation with WFP programme units, using innovative products, methods and workshops to promote the use of evaluations and providing support and guidance for implementation of evaluation recommendations. Management also takes note of the continued support and strategies for strengthening national evaluation capacity.
36. Acknowledging that the overall number of OEV staff increased from 32 in 2016, when WFP's current evaluation policy was adopted, to 41 in 2019, management welcomes the addition of national staff in regional bureaux to support regional evaluation officers. However, it should be noted that the key change has been an improvement in the ratio of fixed-term staff to total positions, from 38 percent in 2016 to 71 percent in 2019, providing greater stability in the OEV workforce and, it is expected, stabilizing in the coming years.
37. Management notes that the centralized evaluation recommendation implementation rate was 64 percent in 2019, compared to 81 percent in 2018. With comprehensive data available only for centralized evaluations, management is seeking further improvement and is committed to continued efforts to strengthen and promote the systematic and coherent monitoring of the implementation of recommendations from all WFP evaluations. Management appreciates the dedication of OEV, in coordination with the Performance Management and Reporting Division, in supporting that process.
38. Management welcomes the delivery of the 2019 evaluation workplan, the completion of all planned evaluations, the commencement of an additional synthesis and the launch of one impact evaluation window.

III. Evaluation and how it is evolving at WFP

39. Looking ahead, management agrees with the key priorities identified by OEV to ensure continued progress towards the achievement of the objectives set out in the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021): ensuring continued delivery of independent, credible and useful centralized and decentralized evaluations; strengthening evaluation coverage; ensuring adequate evaluation management capacity throughout WFP; strengthening partnerships in international forums; and conducting mid-term reviews of regional evaluation strategies.
40. An external peer review of the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021), which will provide recommendations to the Board, the Executive Director, the Director of Evaluation and the evaluation function steering group, will be presented to the Board in 2021.
41. Management looks forward to the roll-out of a new corporate risk and recommendation tracking tool in September 2020, under the leadership of the Enterprise Risk Management Division. It will enable improved oversight by headquarters, regional bureaux and country offices for following up on all evaluation recommendations and provide for significantly better qualitative and quantitative analysis.
42. The diversification of funding sources initiated in 2019 will be consolidated in 2020, with OEV continuing efforts to embed evaluation costs within country portfolio budgets and to engage with donors to ensure that financial resources are in place to deliver independent, credible and useful decentralized evaluations.
43. With regard to ongoing United Nations reform, management supports OEV's continued engagement internally and within the United Nations Evaluation Group in the development of guidelines related to UNSDCF evaluations. The importance of that work is recognized for its impact on overall evaluation practices at all levels of the organization.

Conclusion

44. Management notes continued progress towards fulfilling the vision of the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) of creating a culture of evaluative thinking and behaviour in support of WFP's contribution to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
45. Management values OEV's investment in dedicated evaluation staff to enable major steps forward in developing WFP's evaluation function, as well as in leading the cross-divisional task force on sustainable financing for the evaluation function, especially at the country level.

Acronyms

CSP	country strategic plan
OEV	Office of Evaluation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal