



World Food Programme
Programme Alimentaire Mondial
Programa Mundial de Alimentos
برنامج الأغذية العالمي

Executive Board

First regular session

Rome, 28 February–2 March 2022

Distribution: General

Agenda item 6

Date: 21 January 2022

WFP/EB.1/2022/6-B/Add.1*

Original: English

Evaluation reports

**Reissued for technical reasons
on 3 February 2022*

For consideration

Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<https://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Preliminary management response to the summary report on the evaluation of the WFP response to the COVID-19 pandemic

1. WFP welcomes the innovative “retrospective developmental” approach followed in the evaluation of its response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The evaluation assessed the extent to which WFP's capacities, systems, structures and procedures have been able to adapt and respond to the demands posed by the sudden onset and global reach of the pandemic.
2. WFP particularly appreciates the use of interviews in the evaluation. They provided overworked staff with an opportunity not only to be debriefed while issues were still fresh but also to focus the attention of stakeholders and management on their unprecedented level of commitment to the principle of “staying and delivering”.
3. The cross-cutting nature of the considerations put forward in the evaluation means that management will require time to prepare a comprehensive response, which it expects to present at the Board's 2022 annual session. In the meantime, the present document presents for the Board's consideration management's initial reaction to the evaluation.

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Items for consideration

4. In general, the evaluation substantiates the future direction for WFP. Some of the items raised for consideration have been incorporated into the recently approved strategic plan, particularly those that regard the repositioning of WFP and its role in post-COVID-19 recovery. Details on how this repositioning will be implemented will be included in an analysis of policy documents that need to be adapted to ensure implementation of the strategic plan, as requested by the Board.
5. As evidenced in the evaluation report, WFP has already established a very strong brand as a “systems enabler”. One of the lessons learned from the pandemic and previous responses is that there is value in providing WFP services on an on-demand basis and, where possible, in partnership. WFP is sensitive to the risk of being perceived as encroaching on the mandates of other agencies and partner organizations.
6. The role of WFP as a critical systems leader and enabler for the humanitarian community emerges clearly from the evaluation. Building on the momentum of its provision of “common services” (as they were referred to during the COVID-19 response), WFP will enhance and consolidate its role as a service provider of choice. The Supply Chain Operations Division will lead the improvement and standardization of the systems and tools deployed during the response, with the objective of enhancing traceability, accountability and operational efficiency. A specific business unit was established to pursue and anchor WFP’s contribution to preparedness and response activities for health emergencies, both by supporting partners such as the Global Fund and the World Health Organization and by building its own temperature-sensitive storage and transport capacity. The final long-term objective is to position the organization as a trusted, reliable partner for the provision of supply chain services in emergency settings.
7. WFP will identify opportunities to build on the recognition generated by its achievements through more effective advocacy, particularly in the areas of food security and nutrition at the national, regional and international levels, in coordination with United Nations and other organizations.
8. The global nature of the pandemic highlighted the need to balance local empowerment with corporate decision making in ways that ensure the effective collection and sharing in real time of information, lessons learned, expertise and corporate decision making.
9. Risk appetite and no-regrets approaches are seen as critical components of success, and WFP is already working to embed them in its frameworks, processes and systems so that it can remain agile and adaptable in future emergencies. From the start of the pandemic, WFP has actively considered its changing risk profile in the face of increasing humanitarian needs and has focused its control and oversight processes when field access is constrained. Actions of particular note in relation to controls and oversight are the issuance of a COVID-19 risk register and minimum control standards for the management of third parties in emergencies, in the second quarter of 2020; an enquiry into controls during the pandemic, focusing on key areas of concern, in the third quarter of 2020; and a management assurance project that examined 89 key controls for high-risk operations in the fourth quarter of 2020.
10. The focused response that the pandemic required has provided an opportunity for learning. Hence, with the launch of the management oversight project in April 2021, WFP is seeking to continue to build the maturity of its risk management and to standardize and simplify its management oversight processes in five core functional areas and in the regional bureaux. Ten principles for regional bureau oversight were agreed to in June 2021, and consultations on a draft framework for the planning and delivery of management oversight and the reporting and follow-up of results are currently being held. The framework is expected to be finalized in the first quarter of 2022, with implementation approved and initiated in the second quarter.

11. To ensure that the emergency framework is conducive to response in a multitude of settings, a new emergency activation protocol has been developed and is expected to be launched in February 2022. The protocol will empower emergency leaders with decision making authority and accountability while improving access to human, administrative, financial and material resources.
12. The Emergency Operations Division is mandated to provide common operational pictures in emergencies through WFP's Operations Centre. During the COVID-19 pandemic response the common operational picture was enhanced by the formalization of a cross-functional analytical group, originally the supply chain working group, providing up to date operational data analysis and planning through the use of advanced analytics and optimization for all new and complex emergencies in accordance with the emergency activation protocol.
13. In the effort to overcome the lengthy process for revising CSPs and their budgets during emergencies WFP developed "immediate surge revision", which makes use of an off-the shelf document that includes pre-defined activities, operational costs, food baskets and cash transfer values that can be activated within 72 hours.
14. The Immediate Response Account (IRA) directive is also being revised, with approval of an updated directive expected in the first half of 2022. The revision proposes expanded criteria for use of the IRA to cover the full emergency response cycle; in addition, a target level for IRA liquidity is being established, along with a resource mobilization strategy for a one-off replenishment of the IRA in 2022.
15. To ensure that the WFP workforce remains able to stay and deliver for years to come, and to build on successful use of global surge capacity, an Executive Director's circular on surge capacity is being prepared. It will outline organization-wide roles in ensuring sufficient surge capacity to provide the basis for emergency workforce planning.
16. WFP has identified a range of areas where critical investments are required in order to enhance operational capacities in emergency preparedness and response, particularly with regard to humanitarian access and cash-based transfers. The Innovation and Knowledge Management Division piloted two support innovations that it was able to scale up rapidly in response to the pandemic, leading to lasting change. In 2020, the COVID-19 fast track innovation programme in South Sudan resulted in the embedding of three projects in field operations. In 2021, in partnership with the German Agency for International Cooperation, WFP created the digital health innovation accelerator to build capacity for vaccine delivery, pandemic preparedness and resilience in low- and middle-income countries. Related initiatives planned for 2022 include the establishment of a community of practice on knowledge management, the deployment of subject matter experts and the piloting of artificial intelligence for knowledge transfer.
17. Although pleased with the overall results of its COVID-19 response, reflected in the conclusions of the evaluation, WFP is very concerned about the "high human cost" of its staff working long hours for protracted periods while under the ever-present threat of the pandemic for themselves and their families, and in circumstances that are more challenging than before COVID-19.

18. Section 7.1 of the strategic plan for 2022–2025 commits WFP to developing its people as key enablers of the achievement of its strategic objectives. In 2022, WFP will continue to provide care and support for its employees, including by investing in a healthy and inclusive work environment, equipping its leaders and people managers with the skills needed for conscious inclusion and empathy and strengthening conflict resolution capacity. In activating its new staffing framework, WFP has set targets for increasing the proportion of its workforce employed under long-term contracts from 40 percent in 2021 to 45 percent in 2022. New ways of working will be piloted in 2022 with a view to balancing operational and employee needs, including in emergencies, and strengthening performance measurement and management based on “deliverables and outcomes” rather than “time and presence”.
19. In accordance with its wellness strategy, WFP will invest in reducing the incidence of workplace injuries and ill health; work to improve the physical and mental well-being of employees; establish workplace safety and health rights, responsibilities and duties; and ensure that employees receive training, counselling and support related to workplace safety, health and well-being, including in emergencies.
20. WFP welcomes the evaluation’s overall conclusion that it provided a “high-quality strategic and operational” response that was, overall, “agile and adaptive”. The conclusion provides evidence that, *prima facie*, WFP’s emergency preparedness, although designed for local and regional responses, can – with enhancements – be effective in dealing with significant global emergencies of unanticipated nature, momentum and impact. WFP will continue to work to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the services that it provides.