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Programme**

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MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TO THE ANNUAL EVALUATION REPORT, 2014

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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted to the Executive Board for consideration.

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the focal points indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The format of this management response to the Annual Evaluation Report, 2014 (AER) marks a departure from previous years. Acknowledging that the AER recommendations are overarching and address systemic issues, this document presents a higher-level response that complements the management responses to the recommendations of individual evaluations. It summarizes how WFP has committed to moving forward on the issues, with reference to specific planned actions contained in the responses to individual evaluations.
2. Management highly values the work undertaken by the Office of Evaluation and the significant contribution it makes to learning and to improving WFP's work. In many ways, 2014 was a watershed for WFP's evaluation function. The United Nations Evaluation Group-Development Assistance Committee Evaluation Peer Review allowed for critical reflection on the independence, credibility and use of evaluation, and stimulated the re-crafting of WFP's evaluation policy, with a focus on strengthening decentralized evaluation and its use in policy and programme design.
3. The AER provides a summary of the findings of a diverse set of evaluations and synthesizes the issues they brought to light. Covering an early stage of implementation of the Strategic Plan (2014–2017), a unifying theme is its assessment of the progress WFP has made in shifting from food aid to food assistance, and from implementer to enabler. Management is pleased that the evaluations recognize progress WFP has made.
4. Management concurs with the forward-looking analysis and recommendations of this year's AER. It agrees with the principal finding that WFP's shift from food aid to food assistance is a continuing process requiring sustained commitment and leadership. It recognizes the importance of developing a strong evidence base for measuring results, and of enhancing monitoring systems and capacity development, especially in resilience-building and nutrition. WFP will continue to prioritize more proactive integration of gender dimensions into project design and improved outcome measurement.

RESPONSES TO OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Management appreciates the framing of these four recommendations at the strategic level to address systemic issues. While the recommendations draw on more specific and detailed recommendations made in individual evaluations, this document addresses only the recommendations made in the AER, responding at the same strategic level at which they are framed in the report.

Leadership of Humanitarian Response

6. In addition to being a watershed year for WFP's evaluation function, 2014 was an unprecedented year for WFP and the entire humanitarian system in view of the extraordinary scale of need and the complexity of crises. The findings of the evaluation on the food security cluster and the use of pooled funds in emergencies have special relevance for WFP's role in humanitarian response.
7. WFP is recognized for its significant support for the humanitarian system, in particular its leadership of the logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters, which provide the foundation for partner-agency operations. However, as the evaluation of the global food security cluster highlighted, there are inherent challenges related to: i) a lack of clarity about operational priorities; ii) the depth and breadth of cluster participation; iii) the uneven commitment and capacity of lead agencies; iv) inconsistent donor support; and v) definition

of roles and responsibilities. Management acknowledges that further dialogue among cluster lead agencies is needed among all clusters at the level of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) to clarify responsibilities and implementation modalities, especially at the country level. Management also agrees with the need to provide adequate resources for clusters.

8. Lessons from the food security cluster and pooled funds evaluations have been shared with IASC partners and have contributed to WFP's role in improving inter-agency coordination. WFP's response to the Ebola virus disease demonstrated its commitment to supporting other humanitarian actors. WFP will remain at the forefront of inter-agency humanitarian response.

Removing Bottlenecks in Approaches to Food Assistance

9. WFP's use of cash and vouchers and the Purchase for Progress pilot are significant achievements that offer lessons for implementing food assistance. The deployment of innovative, people-centred tools that are sensitive to local conditions and market dynamics has transformed the way WFP addresses food security. As noted in the evaluations, better coordination across management functions and more integrated, flexible processes are required to support the scaling up of programming innovations.
10. WFP agrees with the AER that developing practical, actionable guidance in critical policy areas is vital. Progress being made includes: a revised cash and voucher manual issued in late 2014 and significant expansion of web-based guidance for several programme areas. WFP will continue to invest in its capacity to design and implement food assistance programmes appropriate to the contexts in which it operates.
11. The ongoing Financial Framework Review and the People Strategy address the need for financial and resource strategies that support effective delivery of new programme modalities.

Strengthening WFP's Ability to Manage for Results

12. A recurring theme in evaluations presented in 2014 was the need for WFP to build and maintain a strong, systematic evidence base to demonstrate results. Measuring and reporting on results was generally stronger at the output level than at the outcome level. These findings reflect limited capacity and investment in these areas in previous years, which is now being rectified. During 2014, WFP established a normative framework for monitoring, made significant investments in staff training and capacity development, and extended the use and roll-out of its country office monitoring and evaluation tool. These measures improve organizational performance and enhance WFP's ability to design, implement and monitor programmes, and address barriers to the systematic measurement of outcomes.
13. WFP acknowledges the importance of matching these measures with improved guidance on targeting and better use of disaggregated data to facilitate understanding of gender dimensions and capture additional benefits beyond those derived by direct recipients of food, cash or vouchers. The systems and capacity now being established will go a long way to enabling this.
14. Management's commitment to improved operational monitoring and programme management extends to performance reporting. Improvements in the quality of Standard Project Reports and the Annual Performance Report demonstrate WFP's commitment to being accountable for results.

Strategic Planning and Programming at Country Level

15. Country portfolio evaluations – in particular those conducted in middle-income countries – provide valuable insights for planning WFP’s country presence. Given the importance WFP places on partnership with governments, its work needs to align with national planning processes. WFP acknowledges the need for a shift towards a more strategic perspective and is establishing the necessary support and guidance. This will facilitate a more holistic response to national priorities, reflecting WFPs comparative advantage in each country’s context.
16. WFP is moving towards a country portfolio approach, which is intended to provide a clearer connection between the WFP Strategic Plan and the expected outcomes for the people WFP serves. The portfolio approach involves an analysis of challenges to achieving the Zero Hunger targets and the development with national governments of country-specific strategic plans that set out WFP’s contribution to national priorities and goals. Implementation of the portfolio approach requires systemic changes such as development of a portfolio budget; this is currently under consideration in the context of the Financial Framework Review. Management is committed to making structural changes in order to ensure that WFP is fully fit for purpose to support national governments.

CONCLUSION

17. Management is pleased to note that the Office of Evaluation will continue to facilitate improved organizational performance by identifying lessons learned. The evaluation peer review indicated that WFP’s central evaluation function serves WFP well. Action is being taken on its suggestion to update the evaluation policy to provide a more structured approach to decentralized evaluations.
18. WFP has been increasingly proactive in learning from – and following up on – evaluation recommendations. Management’s increased interaction throughout the evaluative process has ensured greater agreement on findings and recommended actions. Improvements in the programme review process have contributed to the more systematic integration of evaluation findings into project design and implementation. In addition, WFP’s inter-agency collaboration is enhancing awareness of the value of its evaluative process. Management expects this awareness to evolve further as WFP commits to more joint and collaborative evaluations in the future.
19. Consistent with the recommendations of the evaluation peer review, the closer work between management and the Office of Evaluation has supported learning. As the new evaluation policy is developed, this productive work will be enhanced, contributing to WFP’s reputation for commitment to high performance.