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Management response to the annual evaluation report for 2018

Introduction

1. This document presents management's response to the third annual evaluation report produced by the Office of Evaluation (OEV) in line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021).
2. Management notes the continued commitment of OEV to delivering effective and efficient evaluations and the important role evaluation plays in supporting organizational learning, accountability, transparency and overall performance and results.
3. Management acknowledges the progress made by OEV in aligning the WFP evaluation function with the strategic direction of WFP and trends in its operating environment. Specific reference is made to the overview of centralized and decentralized evaluations completed, conducted and planned in 2018 and 2019; the performance of the WFP evaluation function; and support to the organizational strategic priorities.
4. Management values the annual evaluation report, particularly the outlook for the evaluation function and the areas highlighted for attention in the coming years.
5. The annual evaluation report is divided into three parts. Management's response follows the structure of the report and highlights the evaluation-related efforts and achievements that supported evidence-based decision making, the strengthening of the WFP knowledge base and accountability in the following three areas:
 - 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; and
 - III. The outlook for the evaluation function and areas highlighted for attention in coming years.

I. WFP evaluations for evidence-based decision making

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6. Management recognizes that the programme of centralized evaluations is designed to be as relevant as possible to WFP's dynamic programming. Fifteen evaluations were completed or ongoing in 2018 and a new impact evaluation "window" was initiated in WFP priority areas. This first impact evaluation window will examine cash-based transfers and gender.
7. Global evaluations have been balanced in terms of the priorities of the WFP Strategic Plan, and there has been an increase in the number of policy evaluations addressing cross-cutting themes. Two policy evaluations related to core aspects of WFP's humanitarian mandate – the evaluation of the policy on humanitarian protection¹ and the evaluation of the policies on the humanitarian principles² and access³ in humanitarian contexts – have led to the preparation of a new humanitarian protection policy and the strengthening of the dissemination of the policies on access and humanitarian principles. In 2019 an evaluation of the Gender Policy (2015–2020) will be conducted and the evaluation report will be presented to the Board in 2020.
8. The evaluation of the update of WFP's safety nets policy⁴ began in 2018 and will be presented to the Executive Board for consideration at its 2019 annual session. In late 2018, OEV also initiated an evaluation of the People Strategy.⁵
9. Management welcomes the strategic evaluations on topics central to the WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021). The first strategic evaluation assessed the pilot country strategic plans (CSPs) and concluded that the adoption of the CSP framework was a significant step forward for the organization; the evaluation was well received by management and the Executive Board. The second strategic evaluation examined WFP's support for enhanced resilience; it concluded that WFP has the foundations for and high-level strategic commitment to supporting the enhancement of resilience in order to avoid recurrent crises.
10. Another evaluation that began in 2018 will assess WFP's capacity to respond to emergencies, an area that accounts for the largest part of its portfolio and in which it considers leadership to be a priority. Two new strategic evaluations began in early 2019: one will analyse WFP's funding strategy and the other will assess the effects of school feeding on hunger and nutrition, in line with WFP priorities for 2017–2022, including an increased focus on school feeding.
11. Management appreciates that when selecting country portfolios for evaluation OEV prioritizes utility, timing the evaluations to inform the design of CSPs. In 2018, country portfolio evaluations were completed, for Mali, Somalia, the Central African Republic and Ethiopia.
12. Management welcomed the evaluation of the WFP regional response to the Syrian crisis, which raised the question of how WFP and the wider humanitarian community define a successful humanitarian response, particularly when balancing the challenges of the large-scale delivery of assistance and sensitivity to beneficiary needs. The evaluation found that WFP had met the basic food needs of millions of people through innovation, adaptation, pilot approaches and, where necessary, leadership on behalf of the humanitarian community. Six recommendations were made, including greater attention to gender and protection and better mechanisms for accountability to affected populations all were agreed by management.

¹ WFP/EB.1/2012/5-B/Rev.1.

² WFP/EB.A/2004/5-C.

³ WFP/EB.1/2006/5-B/Rev.1.

⁴ WFP/EB.A/2012/5-A.

⁵ WFP People Strategy. A People Management Framework for Achieving WFP's Strategic Plan (2014–2017) (WFP/EB.2/2014/4-B).

13. An evaluation of the corporate Level 3 emergency response in North-Eastern Nigeria started in 2018 and is expected to inform the design and delivery of future corporate responses and the implementation of the CSP for Nigeria for 2019 to 2022.
14. Management recognizes that the number of decentralized evaluations conducted increased substantially over the period 2016–2018 compared with the number projected in early 2016. Twenty-six evaluations were completed in 2018, and ten in 2017. This demonstrates a higher demand for decentralized evaluations than anticipated when the evaluation strategy was developed. Management appreciates that the distribution of the decentralized evaluations takes into account the formulation of new CSPs and interim CSPs and is evolving over time to factor in adjustments to country office CSP implementation timelines.
15. Management notes that in regard to evaluation syntheses OEV continued to pilot the use of qualitative analysis software (ATLAS.ti) to build a repository of evaluation evidence and commissioned a synthesis of WFP's country portfolio evaluations in the Sahel and Horn of Africa to identify findings and lessons applicable to operations in fragile contexts and conflict settings.

II. The performance of the WFP evaluation function

16. Management notes positive major developments in the WFP evaluation function. Given the increasing number of centralized and decentralized evaluations, management supports the restructuring process launched in 2018 to ensure the flexible and scalable management of evaluations, supported by a change management process.
17. Management welcomed the launch of a corporate evaluation management information system in 2018. The system manages information for centralized and decentralized evaluations and facilitates corporate reporting using key performance indicators for the WFP evaluation function. The launch of system represents a major step forward in assuring the quality of data on evaluation processes, streamlining and reducing transactional costs; and significantly enhancing reporting capabilities. Management also appreciates OEV training and communication activities aimed at ensuring the successful roll-out of the new system in all six regional bureaux.
18. Management notes the positive trend in the number and variety of joint evaluations, which are important instruments for assessing the effectiveness of joint approaches. These evaluations should be continued in order to foster coherence and synergies among the agencies, and management looks forward to hearing more about their results and impact.
19. Management notes OEV efforts in 2018 to support country-level capacity building through decentralized evaluations, which helped strengthen national evaluation capacities by engaging national partners in evaluation processes.
20. Management appreciates the joint work of OEV and the Performance Management and Monitoring Division (RMP), in cooperation with the Human Resources Division, to strengthen the WFP monitoring and evaluation workforce. Such collaboration is important for assessing and filling monitoring and evaluation staffing gaps and should continue to enhance operating models and synergies between the two functional areas. Management also notes the completion of the monitoring and evaluation Future International Talent (FIT) pool in 2019 and encourages OEV and RMP to continue to ensure the presence of a stable and competent global workforce for monitoring and evaluation in the country offices and regional bureaux.
21. In terms of evaluation capacity development, management acknowledges the importance of investing in staff capacity at the country and regional levels to ensure high quality and useful decentralized evaluations. In 2018, 28 offices benefitted from the EvalPro evaluation learning programme, which has been delivered in 62 offices including regional bureaux and headquarters, with regional evaluation officers providing support and coaching.

22. Regarding resources for the evaluation function, management recognizes the value of the Contingency Evaluation Fund as a stop-gap mechanism for country offices that have planned decentralized evaluations and face funding shortfalls despite having budgeted for evaluation, particularly in view of the increasing number of decentralized evaluations. Management supports the establishment of a cross-divisional task force with the mandate to develop a strategic approach to ensuring sustainable financing for the evaluation function, especially at the country and regional levels.
23. Management welcomes the evaluation coverage achieved in 2018 and the changes to the coverage norms, especially those related to the demand-led decentralized evaluation function and the transition to the Integrated Road Map by 2019. Management appreciates that decentralized evaluations complement other evaluation types and have a clear purpose.
24. Management notes that in 2018 there was an increase in the use of evaluation evidence in programme design and long-term adjustments to programmes. Of particular merit were the summaries of evaluation findings produced by four regional offices to support country offices with evaluative evidence to inform the design of their new CSPs.
25. In 2018, the implementation rate for recommendations from centralized evaluations was 81 percent. While that rate during 2018 was relatively high, management will continue to seek improvements. In this regard, management looks forward to the roll-out of the new governance risk and compliance system, planned for the end of 2019, together with an improved system for tracking management actions. Management is committed to strengthening the systematic and coherent monitoring of recommendations from all WFP evaluations. Management appreciates the dedication of OEV, in coordination with RMP, to supporting the implementation of recommendations.

III. Evaluation – How is it evolving at WFP?

26. Looking ahead, management agrees with the priorities identified by OEV for 2019, which will aim to ensure continued progress towards achieving the objectives set out in the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021). In particular, management agrees with the alignment of future OEV priorities with the recommendations deriving from the evaluation of the pilot CSPs.
27. Management also acknowledges work initiated by OEV in 2018 to develop an impact evaluation strategy aimed at better harnessing the full potential of impact evaluation to generate evidence in priority areas and thus inform global efforts to end hunger.
28. Management welcomes OEV's ongoing collaboration with RMP and the Human Resources Division to strengthen WFP's monitoring and evaluation workforce and encourages OEV to prioritize this work in 2019.
29. In 2018 to ensure balanced progress towards the four inter-dependent outcomes of WFP's Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) through phased implementation in accordance with the Corporate Evaluation Strategy (2016–2021), management notes, OEV's needs-based budget was USD 9.23 million, of which USD 8.32 million was approved. It is acknowledged that in response to this funding shortfall OEV prioritized activities. In 2019, in line with the Management Plan (2019–2021), OEV expects a budget increase, demonstrating WFP's commitment to strengthening evaluation.
30. With the ongoing reform of the United Nations development system, management supports OEV's engagement internally and within the United Nations Evaluation Group in order to assess the implications the reform will have on United Nations Development Assistance Framework Evaluations and on evaluation practice.

Conclusion

31. Management notes continued progress made towards fulfilling the vision set out in the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) of creating a culture of evaluative thinking and behaviour in support of WFP's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
32. Management also values OEV's investments in dedicated evaluation staff to enable major steps forward in the development of WFP's evaluation function.

Acronyms used in the document

CSP	country strategic plan
OEV	Office of Evaluation
RMP	Performance Management and Monitoring Division