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Synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations (2011–2019)

Executive summary

WFP policies provide the normative framework within which the organization realizes its corporate goals as articulated in its successive strategic plans. The policies reflect WFP's dual humanitarian and development mandate.

This report synthesizes the findings of nine policy evaluations conducted between 2011 and 2019. It brings together evidence and lessons to inform ongoing consideration of the WFP policy cycle and function.

The evidence shows a currently diffuse and complex policy environment at WFP. A lack of policy coherence, coordination and prioritization risks both coverage gaps and confusion and competition between overlapping policy areas. Individual policies struggle to define both their relationships to other WFP policies and their relative importance to the organization, compounding difficulties for WFP employees on the ground.

This situation arises from systemic weaknesses in WFP's policy formulation and implementation arrangements, identified in policy evaluations conducted since 2011. Challenges include unsystematized approaches to designating policies and related documents; inconsistent use of formal classification categories for Executive Board submission; a lack of clear policy typology for different areas of work; and weaknesses in policy scrutiny and approval processes. Policy design quality has suffered from unclear standards and expectations for content, including weak evidence bases; gaps in internal logic; inconsistent and unclear use of terminology; and limited gender mainstreaming.

In line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings the editing of this report has been limited and as a result some of the language in it may not be fully consistent with the World Food Programme's standard terminology or editorial practices. Please direct any requests for clarification to the Director of Evaluation.

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Despite extensive consultation on design and the production of guidance complementing policy documents, policy implementation in WFP over the period was constrained by a range of factors. These included limited leadership and management commitment; weak or lacking accountability frameworks; limited dissemination; and insufficient human and financial resources. Evaluations revealed policies that were not actively used across the organization, particularly below the headquarters level.

Internal management reporting on the implementation of evaluation recommendations lacks reliability. There is evidence that recommendations are taken seriously and acted upon by policy owners, however, although not always consistently or comprehensively. Recommendations on policy revision and updating, implementation mechanisms, building staff capacities, generating research and forming partnerships were all addressed to at least some degree. However, matters requiring more systemic change – such as knowledge management and accountability systems – have received less comprehensive treatment.

The lessons from this synthesis suggest that constructing an enabling policy environment within WFP would be facilitated by clarifying policy nomenclature; aligning the policy universe with WFP absorptive capacity; defining a common framework for policy content, geared to coherence; and robustly embedding accountability and resources for policy implementation. Policies also require more than a standalone document; they require full and visible corporate leadership, momentum and resources, as well as implementation-level guidance and comprehensive accountability.

To support the shift to an enabling policy environment, the synthesis includes three strategic and three operational recommendations. The strategic recommendations are that WFP clarify and confirm the policy cycle procedure, updating the 2011 policy formulation document; clarify policy governance and accountability procedures; and define the policy universe through an updated WFP policy framework, applying coherence as a key principle. The operational recommendations are that WFP adopt a policy building approach with clarified standards for staff; overhaul the current policy compendium; and review the processes for developing high-quality management responses to evaluations and ensuring follow-up on evaluation recommendations.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations (2011–2019) (WFP/EB.A/2020/7-D) and the management response (WFP/EB.A/2020/7-D/Add.1), and encourages further action, taking into account considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

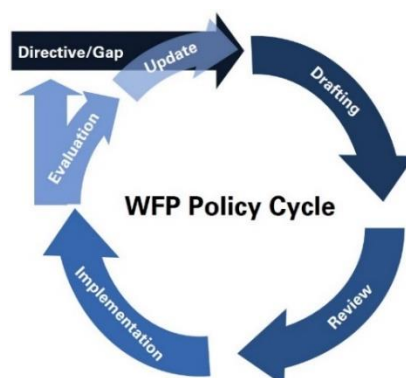
Introduction

1. The WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021) sets out the role of WFP within the commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It presents WFP's vision to lift the most vulnerable and marginalized people out of hunger, moving from saving lives to changing lives, focusing first on those in greatest need.
2. WFP policies provide the normative framework within which the organization aims to realize these goals. Policies cover WFP programmatic areas, corporate themes and cross-cutting concerns. They reflect WFP's dual mandate for humanitarian and development activity.
3. At a time of United Nations system reform and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Secretary-General's Decade of Action to deliver the global goals, and as WFP moves into its second generation of country strategic plans, WFP's policy function faces increasing demands. This synthesis brings together evidence and lessons from nine policy evaluations, conducted during the period 2011–2019, to help inform the organization's future decision making.

Context

4. **Policy framework** – WFP currently has 33 policies in force.¹ A compendium of policies relating to the strategic plan is updated and presented to the Executive Board for information on an annual basis. It lists all current policies and is meant to note those superseded and those in need of updating.²
5. **Policy cycle** – According to the policy formulation document approved by the Executive Board in 2011,³ new WFP policies may be initiated when:
 - WFP enters into new areas of work;
 - a gap in existing policies is identified; or
 - the changing context or directives from governing bodies require a policy to be reviewed and reissued.
6. The 2011 policy formulation document presents the WFP policy cycle, which follows a path from policy initiation through to policy drafting, review, implementation and evaluation (figure 1).

Figure 1: WFP policy cycle



¹ "Compendium of policies relating to the Strategic Plan" (WFP/EB.2/2019/4-H), para. 4.

² Ibid.

³ "WFP Policy Formulation" (WFP/EB.A/2011/5-B).

7. **Policy governance** – Under the 2011 policy formulation document, policies are submitted to the Executive Board according to three classifications, as follows:
 - For approval: Policy papers prepared following a directive from the General Assembly or ECOSOC that bring WFP into a new area of work and/or have significant budget implications;
 - For consideration: Other policy papers; and
 - For information: Policy updates, operational guidelines, implementation plans and other reports.
8. **Policy management** – Since February 2015, policy approval has been the remit of the WFP Executive Management Group (EMG), subject to Executive Director and subsequently Executive Board endorsement.⁴ In 2019 WFP formed an internal policy cycle task force⁵ responsible for setting the direction for policy priorities and coordinating policy change within the organization.⁶
9. **Policy evaluation** – All policies approved after 2011 and included in the policy compendium are meant to be evaluated from four to six years after the start of their implementation.⁷ For policies approved prior to 2011, evaluation of either the policy itself or the theme addressed by the policy is based on the criterion of continued relevance to WFP's work or potential to contribute to new policy development. The topics of some policies are also covered by strategic evaluations and may not be the subject of a dedicated policy evaluation. Evaluations may also be commissioned early upon request, subject to approval by the Director of Evaluation. Selection of policies to be evaluated is based on the length of time since approval, consultation with management and utility. Policy evaluations assess the quality and results of specific policies and the systems, guidance, initiatives and programmes established to implement them, as well as the factors that enable or inhibit the achievement of results.

Purpose

10. The purpose of this synthesis is to enhance the knowledge base on WFP policy development and policy effectiveness, identify recurrent findings useful for deriving lessons in different policy areas and reflect on how effectively WFP has responded to and used policy evaluations to improve results.⁸ It addresses four questions:
 - i) What common themes and systemic issues arise in policy evaluations regarding policy formulation and implementation?
 - ii) What factors have supported or constrained effective policymaking and policy implementation?
 - iii) To what extent has WFP implemented the actions agreed to in the management responses to evaluations?
 - iv) To what extent has WFP applied the learning generated through policy evaluations?

⁴ WFP. 2018. Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP.

⁵ The policy cycle task force is intended to become a working group by June 2020.

⁶ Chaired by the Director, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, overseen by the Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department.

⁷ "WFP Policy Formulation" (WFP/EB.A/2011/5-B); see also "Evaluation Policy (2016–2021)" (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1).

⁸ WFP. 2020. *Terms of Reference, Synthesis of Evidence and Lessons from WFP's Policy Evaluations (2011–2019)*, available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/synthesis-evidence-and-lessons-wfps-policy-evaluations-2011-2019>.

11. Table 1 lists the nine policy evaluations included in this synthesis, which cover ten policies.⁹ Figure 2 provides their timeline in relation to WFP's policy cycle and strategic plans.

Title of policy document	Year of issue	Board session at which evaluation of policy was presented
WFP School Feeding Policy	2009	EB.1.2012
WFP Gender Policy	2009	EB.1.2014
Vouchers and Cash Transfers as Food Assistance Instruments: Opportunities and Challenges ^b	2008	EB.1.2015
Nutrition Policy	2012	EB.2.2015
WFP Policy on Capacity Development: An update on implementation ^c	2009	EB.1.2017
WFP Corporate Partnership Strategy (2014–2017) ^d	2014	EB.A.2017
WFP Humanitarian Protection Policy	2012	EB.A.2018
Humanitarian Principles (2004) and Note on Humanitarian Access and its Implications for WFP (2006) ^e	2004, 2006	EB.A.2018
Update of WFP's Safety Nets Policy: The Role of Food Assistance in Social Protection ^f	2012	EB.A.2019

^a The term "policy" is used in this document to cover the different categories of policy documents covered by the nine evaluations (see para. 15 on policy designations).

^b Referred to elsewhere in this document as the 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper.

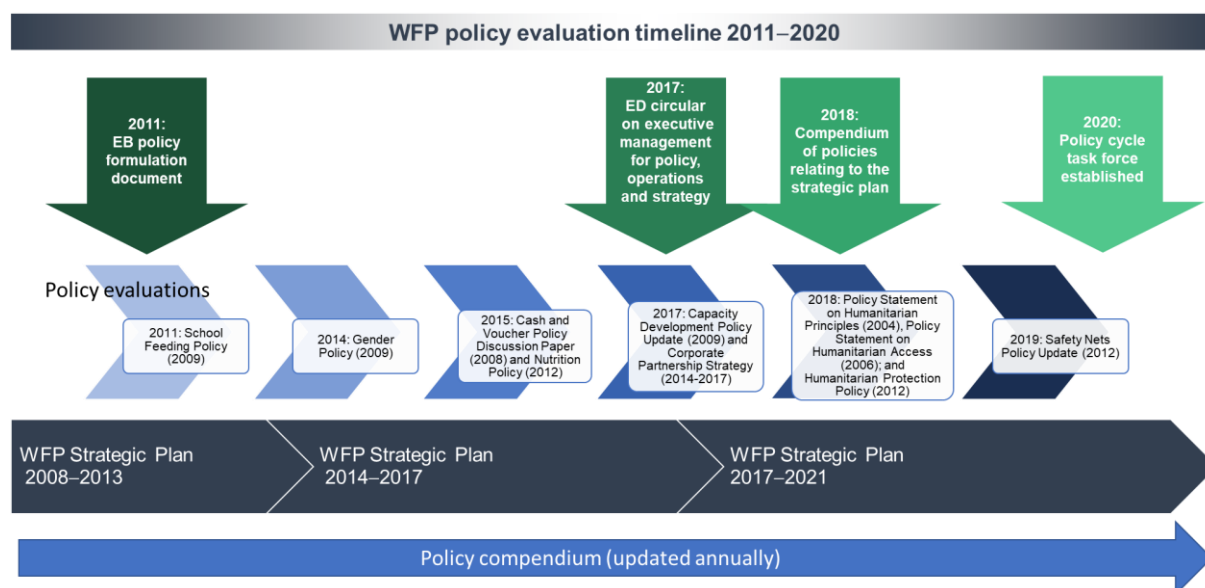
^c Referred to elsewhere in this document as the 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update.

^d Despite the label of "strategy", this evaluation was commissioned and managed as a policy evaluation (given its inclusion in WFP's policy compendium).

^e Referred to elsewhere in this document as the 2004 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Principles and the 2006 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Access.

^f Referred to elsewhere in this document as the 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update.

⁹ The policies on humanitarian principles and humanitarian access were evaluated jointly.

Figure 2: Policy evaluations 2011–2020

Source: Synthesis team.

Methodology

12. This synthesis applied a structured analytical framework, building on previous work by the Office of Evaluation on assessing policy quality.¹⁰ Systematic data extraction was conducted and analytical fields adapted and adjusted as new themes emerged.¹¹ Datasets included the nine policy evaluations and their associated management responses; key corporate information including policy formulation guidance; strategic plans; annual performance reports; audit reports; updates on the implementation of evaluation recommendations; and other relevant information. Findings were triangulated through interviews with WFP headquarters and regional bureau staff and validated by an internal reference group comprising WFP policy and programme staff at the headquarters and regional bureau levels. The term “policy” is applied to encompass all the various types of documents assessed by the policy evaluations (see para. 15 on designations).¹²
13. Limitations include variable results data and the inability to fully validate management information on the implementation of evaluation recommendations. These limitations were mitigated as far as feasible through triangulation across data sources, including through interviews. The synthesis does not address programmatic or operational issues in the various policy areas. It is also necessarily focused on corporate-level rather than field-level concerns. Findings of this synthesis reflect only the 10 policies evaluated; they do not cover WFP’s full range of policies in force.

¹⁰ WFP. 2018. Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP.

¹¹ The Annex gives an overview of some of the analytical fields that emerged and were used to analyse the policy documents included in the synthesis.

¹² Despite being designated as something other than a policy (e.g. a “strategy” or “update”), documents such as the WFP Corporate Partnership Strategy (2014–2017) were included in the WFP policy compendium and, as a result, underwent policy evaluation.

Findings

What common themes and systemic issues arise in policy evaluations regarding policy formulation and implementation?

The nine policy evaluations identified common themes regarding policy formulation and implementation at WFP. These included diverse policy initiation “triggers” and no clear policy typology; inconsistency in the classification of policy documents as being for approval, consideration or information; variable approaches to policy scrutiny and approval; limited internal policy coherence; and limited corporate leadership and ownership across the organization.

Policy initiation, designation and classification

14. **Diverse policy initiation triggers** – Of the ten policies evaluated, five had no direct predecessor.¹³ Two of the three policy initiation triggers described in the 2011 policy formulation document were applicable to the evaluated policies (see para. 5). However, the evaluations also recorded four additional triggers (table 2).

¹³ Cash and vouchers, corporate partnerships, humanitarian principles/access, school feeding.

TABLE 2: POLICY INITIATION TRIGGERS		
Policy initiation trigger	No. of evaluated policies	Policy
WFP enters new areas of work	1	2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper
A gap in existing policies is identified	0	
A changing context or changing directives from governing bodies require a policy to be reviewed and reissued	2	2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper 2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy
Perceived need to clarify and codify a particular issue for staff	6	2004 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Principles 2006 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Access 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper 2009 School Feeding Policy 2012 Nutrition Policy 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy 2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy
Request to formalize and communicate to partners expanding areas of WFP activity	5	2004 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Principles 2006 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Access 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper 2009 School Feeding Policy 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy 2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy
Responding to growing international concerns (e.g. regarding protracted conflict-related crises)	3	2004 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Principles 2006 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Access 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy
Following an evaluation recommendation	3	2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update

Source: Synthesis team.

15. **Diverse designations** – The 2011 policy formulation document does not provide a list of categories or an explanation of the normative hierarchy. All 10 evaluated policies featured in the 2019 policy compendium, yet only four, namely those for gender, nutrition, humanitarian protection and school feeding, were formally designated as WFP policies (table 3 below).

TABLE 3: POLICY DESIGNATIONS	
Designation	Policy
Policy	2009 School Feeding Policy 2009 Gender Policy 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy 2012 Nutrition Policy
Policy update	2009 Capacity Development Policy Update 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update
Policy discussion paper	2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper
Policy statement	2004 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Principles 2006 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Access
Strategy (included in the policy compendium)	2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy

Source: Synthesis team.

16. Political sensitivities affected some choices; for example, the evaluation of the 2008 Cash and Voucher “policy discussion paper” found that its status arose from the delicate balance required to reach consensus among Executive Board members regarding expansion of WFP modality options.
17. **No clear policy typology** – Policies variously covered programmatic areas (school feeding, safety nets, nutrition); modalities (cash and vouchers, capacity development); cross-cutting issues (humanitarian protection, gender, humanitarian principles/access); and institutional concerns (corporate partnerships). However, no formalized policy typology was in place to support categorization or policy prioritization. This is evidenced by, for example, the fact that, although policy updates do not formally replace prior policies in force, in some cases they have been treated organizationally as separate policy documents.
18. **Varied use of Executive Board document classifications** – Other than for the two policy updates, required to be submitted to the Executive Board for consideration, the three classifications for Executive Board submission (see para. 7) were not upheld across the 10 policies (table 4). Only three of the four policies were submitted for approval, while the policy statements on humanitarian principles and humanitarian access (developed prior to the issuance of WFP Policy Formulation in 2011) were submitted for information and consideration, respectively.

TABLE 4: CLASSIFICATIONS USED AS A BASIS FOR SUBMISSION OF POLICY DOCUMENTS TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD	
Classification	Policy
For approval	2009 Gender Policy 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy 2012 Nutrition Policy
For consideration	2009 School Feeding Policy 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper 2006 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Access 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update 2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy
For information	2004 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Principles

Source: Synthesis team.

19. **Inconsistent policy scrutiny** – Evaluations found different degrees of Executive Board scrutiny in policy approval. For example, the evaluation of the 2009 Gender Policy found approval provided without adequate technical scrutiny, while that of the 2009 School Feeding Policy found intensive Executive Board review of the policy but insufficient consideration of resource requirements for implementation. A year later, a more robust approach was adopted with the 2012 Nutrition Policy approval, including Executive Board requests for a follow-up paper, a progress report and the subsequent 2015 policy evaluation.

Policy coherence¹⁴

20. **Largely strong external alignment** – All nine evaluations found WFP policies broadly consistent with international standards and commitments at the time. At least six policies reflected current themes in the prevailing global discourse and debate. WFP was the only agency among several assessed in evaluations to have formulated policies on capacity development and cash and vouchers.
21. However, three evaluations also found some disconnect with prevailing normative frameworks. Specifically, the 2012 Nutrition Policy did not consider the needs of certain vulnerable groups reflected in international concerns, and certain WFP definitions differed from those used by the cash and voucher community of practice in 2015. Some capacity development issues current in the prevailing international discourse, such as the need to ensure that systems endure and perform over time, were not reflected in the 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update.
22. **Strong coherence with WFP strategic plans** – Nine policies reflected the priorities of the prevailing strategic plans, although the limited presence of gender in the WFP Strategic Plan (2008–2013) constrained the alignment of the 2009 Gender Policy. The 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper was viewed by some as more restrictive¹⁵ than the WFP Strategic Plan (2008–2013), which envisaged a more extended use of the modality.

¹⁴ All the main synthesis findings relating to policy coherence; corporate leadership and ownership; and policy design and implementation are also presented in the annex.

¹⁵ In that it did not expand on the 2007 directive authorizing pilots for cash and vouchers up to USD 3 million in value.

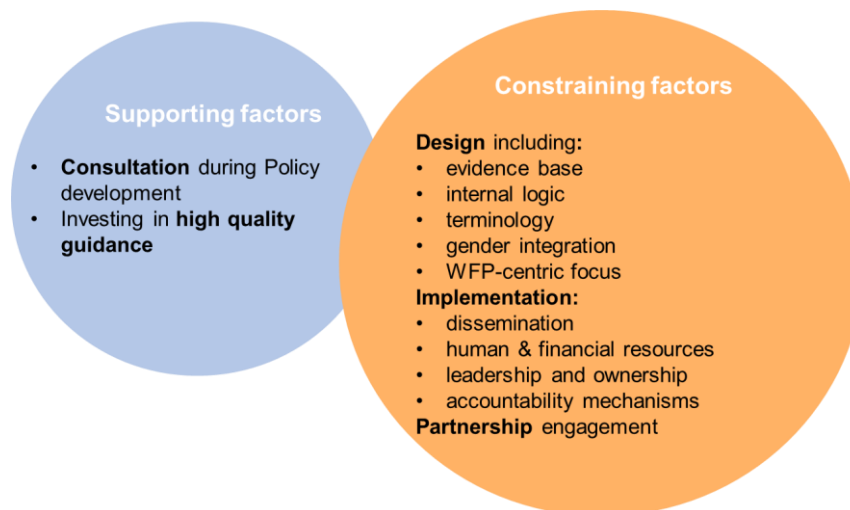
23. **Gaps in internal policy consistency** – The lack of a corporate mechanism for ensuring consistency across policy areas, noted in the 2015 evaluation of the 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper, was reflected in all nine evaluations. Eight evaluations found gaps and inconsistencies within and between policy areas. For example:
- The aspirations and guidance of the 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper were not coherent with the nutrition and food security objectives present in other WFP policies and strategies at the time.
 - The 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update and, to a lesser extent, the 2012 Nutrition Policy did not maximize the scope for cross-policy integration.
 - The 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update was coherent with other WFP policies at the time of its adoption but the content of newer policies and guidance eclipsed this alignment.
 - The 2009 School Feeding Policy had technical gaps in aligning coverage with other policy areas.
24. **Unclear prioritization** – At least three evaluations, all of cross-cutting policy issues, found uncertain policy prioritization within WFP. This risked overlap and at times competition across policy areas. For example, the evaluation of the 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy found that several WFP policies and strategies – such as those on humanitarian principles, access in humanitarian contexts, gender, accountability to affected populations, peacebuilding and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse – contributed to protection outcomes. These interlinkages were not clearly defined, however, creating unclear prioritization.

What factors have supported or constrained effective policymaking and policy implementation?

Factors that supported effective policymaking and policy implementation were primarily consultation during policy development and investment in high-quality guidance for staff. Many more factors constrained policy formulation and implementation, including several features of design quality (including weaknesses in the evidence base, internal logic, use of terminology, attention to gender and a WFP-centric focus); implementation challenges (specifically limited dissemination, insufficient human and financial resources for and weaknesses in accountability frameworks and limited leadership and ownership); and limited use of partnerships to support policy implementation.

25. Evaluations identified a range of factors that supported or – more frequently – constrained policymaking and policy implementation at WFP (figure 3). These reflect the findings in the Office of Evaluation’s report on the top 10 lessons for policy quality at WFP.¹⁶

Figure 3: Internal factors supporting or constraining policymaking and policy implementation



Source: Synthesis team.

Supporting factors

26. Two key factors that supported policy implementation were extensive consultation during the design phase and the development of high-quality guidance for staff.
27. **Extensive consultation** – Comprehensive internal and external consultation processes, applied during the design of five policies, supported policy quality and endorsement (box 1):

Box 1: Benefits of consultation in policy development

2009 School Feeding Policy: Intense collaboration with external partners (particularly the World Bank) led to an unprecedented degree of consensus at the Executive Board level.

2012 Nutrition Policy: Ownership among WFP’s nutritionists and senior management was ensured by extensive consultations prior to policy adoption.

2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy: Significant in-house and external consultation among country offices and headquarters management helped build consensus prior to policy adoption.

28. However, extensive consultation did not automatically lead to strong ownership by staff during policy implementation, which only occurred for the 2012 policies on nutrition and humanitarian protection (see para. 45).

¹⁶ WFP. 2018. Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP. <https://www.wfp.org/publications/top-10-lessons-policy-quality-wfp>.

29. **High-quality guidance** – The production of high-quality guidance also supported the implementation of four policies (box 2):

Box 2: Guidance supporting policy implementation

2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper: Policy approval was followed by the creation of detailed directives, guidance and tools, which were much further developed than those of other operational agencies.

2009 School Feeding Policy: An “impressive” volume of guidelines and tools was developed to support policy implementation.

2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy: A range of high-quality guidelines and tools on partnerships and partnership management was produced to support policy implementation.

2012 Safety Nets Policy Update: The production of guidance, an online training platform and knowledge products and the establishment of a community of practice all enhanced policy implementation.

30. Shortcomings were also identified, however. Evaluations found that supporting guidance for the 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update and the 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy lacked utility for staff, while that for the humanitarian principles/access policy statements was too limited to adequately serve staff needs.

Constraining factors

31. Despite positive examples, evaluations identified a wider range of factors that constrained effective policymaking and policy implementation. These also reflect those identified in top 10 lessons for policy quality document. They include weaknesses in design quality; weak implementation planning, including limited dissemination, insufficient resources to support implementation and unclear accountabilities; limited leadership and ownership; and missed opportunities for partnerships.

Policy design

32. **Uneven quality and use of evidence** – At least four policies lacked adequate evidence bases, resulting in stakeholder scepticism with regard to three. Weaknesses included the use of dated evidence; biased use of evidence, with only positive findings cited; and missing evidence (e.g. on costs and cost-effectiveness in the 2009 School Feeding Policy and on overnutrition in the 2012 Nutrition Policy). The 2013 evaluation of the 2009 School Feeding Policy cautioned WFP on the need to make a clear distinction between analytical work and advocacy regarding WFP engagement on the issue.
33. Conversely, the 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy adopted a thorough and incremental approach to evidence-building (box 3):

Box 3: 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy evidence base

The development of the 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy built on a preceding protection project (2005–2008) and focused on evidence building and learning. This “organic” process helped build policy ownership and make protection “visible” within WFP, overcoming some initial internal resistance.

34. **Unclear goals and vision and uncertain internal logic** – Only two policies (the 2012 Nutrition Policy and the 2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy) included clearly articulated visions and goals to which organizational strategies and capacities were geared. In contrast, the lack of such clear articulation in seven policies potentially hindered implementation. None of the nine policies included a formal theory of change, although

more limited logic models¹⁷ were developed for the 2009 School Feeding Policy and the 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy. Three evaluations found weak internal logic, including flawed assumptions regarding institutional change (2009 Gender Policy); a lack of linkages to established priorities (2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy) and unrealistic policy outcomes (2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper).

35. **Unclear and inconsistent terminology** – Six evaluations found unclear or inconsistent use of policy terminology, preventing a shared understanding of the relevant policy issue across WFP. For example, the 2009 Gender Policy lacked a clear definition of “what gender means” for WFP – including a statement on “why gender matters” for the realization of the organizational mandate.
36. **WFP-centric focus** – Three evaluations found policy design centred solely on WFP concerns rather than embracing broader issues. For example, the 2009 School Feeding Policy did not consider the implications of a broader social protection approach, while the 2012 Nutrition Policy focused on food products alone rather than the breadth of factors needed for improved nutrition. The 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy helped WFP define its role as a non-specialized protection agency, at the expense of considering broader protection concerns.
37. **Gender insufficiently incorporated into design** – Five evaluations found only superficial treatment of gender in policy content. Weaknesses included gender analysis that was insufficient to realistically inform programme design, implementation or evaluation in the policy area; and inadequate attention to identifying and measuring gender effects and implications. The 2014 evaluation of the 2009 Gender Policy found only superficial synergies with policies produced concurrently or later¹⁸ and diverse understandings of, and conceptual approaches to, gender.

Policy implementation

38. **Limited dissemination** – Evaluations found limited or shallow dissemination of seven policies, in three cases arising from limited resource availability. The 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper, for example, aimed its communication upwards at WFP governance structures rather than at field-based WFP staff and partners. Limited dissemination was a major factor in constraining policy ownership among staff (para. 45).
39. **Inadequate human resources** – As shown in the annex, eight evaluations found inadequate staffing levels for policy implementation at the headquarters, regional bureau and country office levels:
 - **Headquarters:** Five policies benefited from a headquarters unit established to support implementation but lacked sufficient strength in two cases, with either low staffing and/or limited duration. A strong headquarters-level function was lacking in four other policy areas, with reliance on short-term consultants to implement the 2009 Gender Policy and insufficiently defined roles to support the implementation of the 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update. However, the creation of the Safety Nets and Social Protection Unit in 2016 reinvigorated implementation of the 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update.

¹⁷ Key distinctions include the “big picture” level of a theory of change, including external processes that influence change, while a logic model focuses on specific change at the programme (implementation) level, often one element of the wider theory of change. See Ann Murray Brown. 2016). *What is this thing called Theory of Change?* <https://www.annmurraybrown.com/single-post/2016/03/09/What-is-this-thing-called-Theory-of-Change?>

¹⁸ WFP’s policies on nutrition, HIV and AIDS and humanitarian protection, as well as the strategy “Pro-Smallholder Food Assistance: A Background Paper for WFP’s Strategy for Boosting Smallholder Resilience and Market Access Worldwide”, were all produced after the 2009 gender policy. The 2009 school feeding policy was developed concurrently.

- **Regional bureaux/country offices:** Despite positive findings on the commitment and capacities of field-level staff in three policy evaluations, insufficient human resources at the country and regional levels constrained the implementation of seven policies. Challenges include existing high staff workloads; limited use and capacity limitations of focal points; a lack of continuity due to staff rotation and deployments; and unsustainable use of short-term consultants.
40. Eight evaluations found insufficient staff skills and expertise were available to enable successful policy implementation. Reliance on outsourcing constrained implementation of the 2009 Gender Policy, the 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy and the 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update. The exception was the implementation of the 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper, which benefited from the development and use of a corporate training platform.
 41. **Insufficient financial resources** – Allocated financial resources were insufficient to support the implementation of all 10 evaluated policies, even though demands were kept at a deliberately low level to encourage mainstreaming in the 2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy and the 2004 Policy Statement on Humanitarian Principles. Short-term funding constrained implementation of six policies, notably those that required a medium- or long-term approach to policy issues.
 42. Four evaluations found donor reluctance to provide funding for policy implementation, with reasons including scepticism about the underlying evidence base (2012 Nutrition Policy); concerns about the capacity of WFP to work on long-term issues (2012 Nutrition Policy and 2012 Safety Nets Policy Update); dissatisfaction with corporate reporting on capacity development (2009 Capacity Development Policy Update); and sensitivity about the use of new modalities (2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper).
 43. Three evaluations, notably those covering programmatic areas (nutrition, school feeding and safety nets), questioned whether the relevant policies were realistic in the light of the financial and human resources required for implementation.
 44. **Gaps in corporate leadership** – Seven evaluations found insufficient leadership or senior management policy ownership to enable successful policy implementation. Effects were significant, including a critical undermining of the institutional change needed to ensure adequate treatment of gender and humanitarian protection issues in WFP programming.
 45. **Low staff awareness and ownership** – Linked to limited dissemination (see para. 38), only the 2012 Nutrition Policy and the 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy were widely known across the organization. Awareness of five policies was particularly low, resulting in a “serious gap” in the case of school feeding. Four evaluations nevertheless found that corporate attention to, and appreciation of, the evaluated policies area had grown during policy implementation, although such growth could not be robustly linked to policy development or implementation. Evaluations found greater internal awareness of guidance associated with policies, such as that related to the 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper and the 2014 Corporate Partnership Strategy (see para. 29).
 46. **Weaknesses in corporate accountability** – All nine policy evaluations found weaknesses in aspects of corporate accountability. These included technical weaknesses in results frameworks, limitations in monitoring of policy implementation and gaps in management accountabilities and responsibilities.
 - **Technical weaknesses in results frameworks** – Six of the evaluated policies lacked results frameworks. Where frameworks did exist or where intended results and indicators had been developed, technical weaknesses were noted (table 5).

TABLE 5: TECHNICAL WEAKNESSES IN RESULTS FRAMEWORKS	
Technical weakness	Policy
Relatively unambitious results for the policy issue	2009 Gender Policy
Technical weaknesses in outputs and outcomes	2009 School Feeding Policy 2009 Gender Policy 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper
Technical weaknesses in indicators	2009 Gender Policy 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update 2012 Nutrition Policy 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy

Source: Synthesis team.

- **Limitations in monitoring of policy implementation** – Six evaluations found weaknesses in monitoring and reporting arrangements, leading to under-reporting of results from three policies.¹⁹ For example, monitoring targets under the 2009 Gender Policy were kept separate from WFP’s regular monitoring arrangements, weakening accountability for policy implementation across the organization. A lack of dedicated funding for monitoring and evaluation under the 2012 Nutrition Policy meant that new indicators could not be adequately measured (see para. 41).
- **Gaps in management responsibilities and accountabilities** – Five evaluations also found weaknesses in corporate responsibility and accountability for policy implementation. Specific constraints included the absence of WFP-wide accountability frameworks, unassigned responsibilities for policy implementation and results, the lack of a corporate “home” for policies and, in the case of the 2008 Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper, an initial (albeit subsequently amended) absence of cross-functional leadership.

Missed opportunities for partnership

47. Eight evaluations found scope for improved partnership arrangements to support WFP policy implementation:
- Four evaluations found that WFP had missed opportunities for partnership potential during policy preparation or implementation. For example, WFP neglected relationships with traditional United Nations partners during implementation of the 2009 School Feeding Policy.
 - Four evaluations also found that WFP had missed opportunities to transcend transactional relationships with non-governmental organization implementing partners. The 2014 evaluation of the 2009 Gender Policy noted that this had restricted non-governmental organizations’ ability to lobby WFP or hold it accountable regarding gender issues.
 - Three evaluations²⁰ found insufficient partner capacity for implementation and limitations in the ability of WFP to enhance partner capacity, for example with regard to nutrition-sensitive actions.

¹⁹ Capacity development, corporate partnerships, safety nets.

²⁰ Gender, humanitarian protection, nutrition.

48. Four evaluations – all of cross-cutting areas – found weaknesses in confirming cooperating partners' roles in policy implementation, despite at least partial standards being integrated into field-level agreements. The evaluation of the humanitarian principles/access policy statements noted that contracts with commercial suppliers did not include standards on humanitarian principles equivalent to those for non-governmental organizations, requiring WFP to strike a complex balance between selecting partners on the basis of their access to affected populations and upholding the principles.

To what extent has WFP implemented the actions agreed to in the management responses to evaluations?

Overall, a high proportion of evaluation recommendations were accepted by management, and there is evidence of progress in their implementation. However, WFP internal management data regarding actions taken to implement evaluation recommendations lacked reliability.

49. **Common areas of recommendation** – The nine policy evaluations resulted in a total of 56 recommendations (table 6). All nine evaluations recommended improved policy operationalization and enhanced staff capacity. Operationalization focused on organization-wide issues in many cases, such as integration of policy issues into WFP country planning, business processes and corporate strategizing and strengthening of internal coordination mechanisms. New or updated policies were recommended in four of the nine evaluations and improvements to knowledge management in seven.
50. The implementation of agreed actions in response to evaluation recommendations is well under way, but data validity concerns exist. In its responses, management agreed with 46 (or 82 percent) of the 56 recommendations and partially agreed with 10 (or 18 percent). It committed to a total of 125 actions aimed at implementing the recommendations.²¹
51. As of December 2019, internal management information recorded 84 of 125 actions (or 67 percent) as fully implemented, corresponding to evaluation timelines as follows:
- full implementation of all 74 actions identified in management responses to the three evaluations conducted during the period 2012–2015;
 - partial implementation of eight agreed actions in response to evaluation recommendations from three evaluations conducted during the period 2017–2018, with the remainder either implemented (nine) or to start (three); and
 - implementation still to start for all 31 agreed actions from two evaluations conducted in 2018 and 2019.

²¹ In interviews, several WFP key informants expressed specific concerns about the current process for preparing management responses, including limited cross-functional engagement in preparing them; lack of coordination in the preparation process, particularly with regard to cross-cutting topics; and limited dissemination of responses once prepared.

52. However, close analysis of internal management information, triangulated through interviews, indicated significant data validity concerns, specifically the justification of the “implemented” status for the 84 completed actions. Three main categories of concern were identified:
- description of existing systems in place rather than reporting on tangible completion of the required actions;
 - expression of intentions and future plans rather than description of actions completed; and
 - indication that only some of the steps necessary to implement the recommendations were taken rather than a demonstration of full achievement.
53. The justification of the “implemented” status ascribed was therefore in doubt, reflecting WFP’s lack of effective verification systems for internal reporting on the implementation status of evaluation recommendations.²²
54. Nonetheless, review of wider WFP documentation²³ and consultations with WFP staff provided qualitative evidence of progress against evaluation recommendations, albeit partial in some cases. Table 6 lists the most frequently occurring recommendations by area and the evidence of progress towards recommendation implementation

²² Weaknesses in follow-up on evaluation recommendations were also identified by the United Nations Evaluation Group’s 2015 peer review of the WFP evaluation function. Currently, work is under way, led by the Resource Management Department, to develop a consolidated platform for documenting and tracking all audit and evaluation management responses and implementation of follow-up actions, with the system planned to become operational in September 2020.

²³ Drawing on data from the WFP annual consultation on evaluation (ACE) database; evaluation management responses; subsequent evaluations; and a 2019 report on the implementation status of evaluation recommendations (WFP/EB.A/2019/7-D).

TABLE 6: POLICY EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Themes	Frequency(n=9)	Specific recommendation areas	Evidence/examples of implementation
Improve policy operationalization through mainstreaming across WFP and preparing mechanisms for implementation	9 (all policy evaluations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Integrate the policy issue into WFP country planning, business processes and corporate strategizing ➤ Develop action plans for implementation ➤ Prepare guidance and tools to support implementation ➤ Strengthen coordination mechanisms across WFP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Integration of policy areas into WFP programme planning (gender; cash and vouchers; humanitarian protection; nutrition; school feeding; safety nets) ➤ Guidance and toolkits developed in school feeding; gender; humanitarian protection; humanitarian principles and access; cash and vouchers; social protection and safety nets; nutrition; capacity strengthening; and corporate partnerships <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cash and vouchers manual updated twice since the 2014 evaluation (2019) - Gender integrated into WFP's programme cycle and country strategic plan guidance materials
Staff capacity development	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develop technical expertise for the policy issue through training ➤ Develop advocacy skills for the issue ➤ Increase staffing availability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Training and capacity strengthening undertaken in school feeding; gender; humanitarian protection; humanitarian principles and access; cash and vouchers; social protection and safety nets; nutrition; capacity strengthening; and corporate partnerships <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional partnership workshops conducted to develop partnership and advocacy skills (2017) - Learning modules developed for all staff on protection and on AAP (2019) - Nutrition-sensitive programming guidance developed (2018)
Policy review/updating/revision	7 ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develop a new policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender Policy 2015–2020 approved in 2015 (WFP/EB.A/2015/5-A) - Revised Humanitarian protection policy currently being developed (first Board consultation May 2020)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update the policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2013 School Feeding Policy Update prepared in response to the 2012 evaluation of the 2009 School Feeding Policy - Decision made to prepare a school feeding strategy prior to considering a revised policy (school feeding strategy endorsed by EMG January 2020)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Revise or update the policy/policy update at a later date, once other institutional reforms are in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2017 Nutrition Policy approved (WFP/EB.1/2017/4-C) - Country Capacity Strengthening Policy under development (informal Board consultation April 2020)

TABLE 6: POLICY EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Themes	Frequency(n=9)	Specific recommendation areas	Evidence/examples of implementation
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Do not update or replace the policy ➤ Develop an operational strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cash and Voucher Policy Discussion Paper - Safety nets - Social protection strategy currently being developed - School feeding
Policy dissemination/communication and learning	7 ^b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Undertake dissemination activities ➤ Develop a comprehensive research strategy ➤ Generate relevant research and learning ➤ Capture internal and external lessons ➤ Embed the policy issue in internal and external communications ➤ Develop systems to capture and report information on the policy issue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Research and learning strategies developed (cash and vouchers; school feeding; nutrition) <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comprehensive research strategy developed and publications produced for school feeding (2017) - Cash and vouchers corporate training platform developed and utilized (2017) - A series of studies on protection produced (2019) - Engagement with academic partners to improve the quality and credibility of nutrition research (2018)
Accountability, including monitoring and evaluation	6 ^c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clarify roles and responsibilities for policy implementation ➤ Develop and apply robust monitoring and evaluation platforms for tracking policy implementation and addressing of the issue ➤ Improve/enhance existing corporate indicators ➤ Support WFP country offices in their use of corporate indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Corporate indicators revised and updated with guidance provided to staff (nutrition; gender; humanitarian protection; cash and vouchers; school feeding) ➤ Headquarters units for policy implementation established and enhanced (safety nets; gender; capacity strengthening; cash and vouchers) <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidance provided to country offices and regional bureaux on methodology for nutrition indicators and supporting national nutrition monitoring systems (2017) - Partnership data collected in WFP's internal management tool, COMET (2018)
Financial resources	6 ^d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Dedicate corporate resources to the policy ➤ Establish dedicated internal financing mechanisms for the policy issue ➤ Improve financial monitoring for the policy ➤ Develop a strategic approach to resource mobilization and advocate the mobilization of resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Resources provided for implementation of policies on gender, school feeding, nutrition and cash and vouchers <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investment of approximately USD 2.7 million in implementing the partnership pillar of the Strategic Plan (2017–2021), through the Integrated Road Map (2017) - Investment of USD 3.1 million from the programme support and administrative budget allocated to implementation of the WFP Gender Policy (2015–2020) (2017)

TABLE 6: POLICY EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Themes	Frequency(n=9)	Specific recommendation areas	Evidence/examples of implementation
Building partnerships	6 ^e	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develop partnership agreements with external partners (United Nations, government, civil society, other) ➤ Seek opportunities for joint planning and programming ➤ Participate in relevant international networks ➤ Raise awareness with partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Evidence of strategic partnerships developed in gender; nutrition; corporate partnerships; school feeding; cash and vouchers; safety nets. <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategic and operational partnerships developed with the World Bank in school feeding, culminating in joint research publication (2018) - Participation in global nutrition mechanisms such as SUN, the cluster system, REACH, the Committee on World Food Security and other forums (2019)

Abbreviations: AAP = accountability to affected populations; COMET = country office monitoring and evaluation tool; REACH = Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger and undernutrition; SUN = Scaling Up Nutrition.

^a Capacity development, cash and vouchers, gender, humanitarian protection, nutrition, school feeding, safety nets.

^b Capacity development, cash and vouchers, humanitarian principles and access, protection, nutrition, school feeding, safety nets.

^c Capacity development, cash and vouchers, corporate partnerships, gender, nutrition, safety nets.

^d Cash and vouchers, gender, humanitarian principles and access, protection, nutrition, school feeding.

^e Cash and vouchers, corporate partnerships, gender, humanitarian principles and access, nutrition, school feeding.

To what extent has WFP applied the learning generated through policy evaluations?

Despite progress in evaluation recommendation implementation, gaps were noted in the take-up and use of learning from evaluations, particularly where more systemic or long-term change was advised.

55. **Evidence of learning applied but hesitation on systemic change** – The review of WFP corporate documentation and interviews with staff (see para. 12) identified gaps in the comprehensive take-up and use of learning from policy evaluations. In particular, gaps were noted where evaluations advised systemic change such as in creating comprehensive knowledge management systems and ensuring the sustained availability of required staff and predictable financial resources (table 7).

TABLE 7: GAPS IN THE TAKE-UP AND USE OF POLICY EVALUATION LEARNING	
Learning from policy evaluations^a	Learning take-up/gaps^b
There is a need for a systems-focused approach to policy implementation.	The majority of effort focused on the integration of the policy issue into WFP business planning, staff training and capacity strengthening. There is less evidence of efforts to strengthen coordination mechanisms across WFP, as noted in policy evaluations.
Policy intentions should be aligned with corporate capacities and/or such capacities can be developed.	The bulk of effort undertaken related to staff training, including the conduct of workshops and training materials developed. There is little evidence of increased staffing availability in policy areas and/or ensuring that capacities are enhanced and sustained.
The policy designations and classifications reflected in WFP Policy Formulation should be consistently applied.	While revised policies were approved for gender and nutrition, a lack of clear policy designations and classifications in WFP meant that in other policy areas (e.g. school feeding, country capacity strengthening) strategies rather than formal policies were adopted, or being considered for adoption, resulting in unclear sequencing for future policy revision and updating.
Knowledge management systems should be built to support and inform the policy cycle.	There has been considerable effort to generate research and learning (see table 5) but little evidence of full knowledge management systems being developed, including those to capture and report on the relevant policy issues and ensure the full distillation and use of the learning generated.
Predictable and sustained financial resources are needed to support policy implementation.	Financial resources for dedicated policy areas have been provided at given points in time but there is no evidence of subsequent continued financial commitment or the establishment of dedicated internal financing mechanisms for policy issues or improved financial monitoring as recommended in policy evaluations.
Corporate reporting should be supported by fully comprehensive accountability systems.	Corporate indicators have been adapted in response to policy evaluation recommendations and support provided to country offices for their use but there is no evidence of clarified roles and responsibilities for policy implementation or development of robust monitoring and evaluation platforms for tracking policy implementation.
WFP should move beyond partnership agreements alone to coordination in programming.	While partnership agreements have been developed across policy areas and WFP has participated in relevant international forums, there was little tangible evidence of increased joint planning or programming.

Source: Synthesis team.

^a Summarized from policy evaluation findings, lessons and recommendations.

^b Identified from WFP internal management information on evaluation recommendation implementation, review of corporate documentation and interviews with staff and management.

56. With the exception of findings on nutrition in the Strategic Plan (2017–2021), little explicit reflection of policy evaluation learning within WFP strategic plans. Neither of the WFP strategic plans in effect during the period contained explicit references to policy evaluations. Only findings from the 2015 evaluation of the 2012 Nutrition Policy were explicitly reflected in the WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021), with Strategic Objective 2 (improve nutrition) including commitments to work in global and country-level partnerships for nutrition, strengthen nutrition-sensitive approaches and strengthen the links between nutrition and gender.
57. **Adjustment of corporate indicators reflecting learning from evaluations** – The recommendations of all four relevant evaluations in relation to corporate indicators²⁴ were taken forward in the development of the Corporate Results Framework (2017–2021). Examples include an outcome-level metric for planning and assessing progress in country capacity strengthening (a direct recommendation of the evaluation of the 2009 Capacity Development Policy Update); new indicators to capture nutrition-sensitive interventions (as recommended by the 2015 evaluation of the 2012 Nutrition Policy); adapted gender indicators (proposed by the 2014 evaluation of the 2009 Gender Policy); and revised indicators on protection, included as a direct result of the 2018 evaluation of the 2012 Humanitarian Protection Policy.

Conclusions

58. Overall, the evidence from this synthesis shows a currently diffuse and complex policy environment at WFP. Policy evaluations since 2011 have identified a series of systemic challenges in the WFP policy function that have given rise to this situation.
59. The nine policy evaluations analysed for this synthesis revealed a range of diverse policy initiation triggers and unsystematized policy designations. No clear policy typology for categorizing policies covering different areas of work exists. Policy classifications for submissions to the Executive Board were not applied according to the rationale set out in 2011, and the policies submitted were subject to inconsistent degrees of oversight and scrutiny.
60. Despite efforts to ensure consultative approaches to policy design and to increase policy relevance for staff through the production of operationally-g geared guidance, policies suffered common limitations in the quality of their design. These included limited or weak evidence bases; gaps in internal logic; inconsistent or unclear use of terminology; and weaknesses in gender mainstreaming. A WFP-centric focus was maintained in some policies. Overall, few common standards or expectations for policy content were required or applied.
61. These gaps are more than simply technical shortcomings; their absence constrains policy relevance and successful implementation, particularly at the field level. They were compounded by shortcomings in policy implementation, including limited dissemination (constraining the staff awareness so essential for ownership in a highly decentralized organization) and limited corporate commitment, reflected in insufficient human and financial resources, inconsistent leadership by senior management and weaknesses in accountability frameworks. Partnerships were not always fully utilized to support policy delivery.
62. The result of this unstructured approach is a currently prolific and complex policy universe whose lack of policy coherence, coordination and prioritization is reflected in the linear “menu” of policies listed in the annual policy compendiums. Amid such diffusion, individual

²⁴ Capacity development, cash and vouchers, gender, nutrition.

policies struggle to define their roles and confirm their priority. This risks both coverage gaps with regard to cross-cutting key issues and confusion and competition between conceptually and operationally overlapping policy areas. It also compounds the difficulties for WFP staff on the ground – for example when faced with decision making in complex humanitarian operating environments²⁵ – for whom the benefit of clear policy guidance is furthermore lacking, which may have important implications for affected populations.

63. Despite shortcomings in the validity of internal management information, there is evidence that policy evaluation recommendations are taken seriously and acted upon by WFP management, although not always consistently or comprehensively. Recommendations on policy revision and updating, implementation mechanisms, staff capacity building, research generation and partnership formation have all been addressed to at least some degree.
64. Similarly, despite evidence that at least some learning generated by policy evaluations is taken up in dedicated policy areas, advice on more systemically-oriented requirements – such as adopting a systems-focused approach to policy implementation, building knowledge management systems²⁶ and ensuring that accountability systems comprise fully comprehensive cycles – have received less attention and treatment within the corporate system.
65. Overall, therefore, this synthesis finds that WFP’s internal guidance and systems for policy formulation and implementation would benefit from a revised approach if they are to fully support the development of successor strategic plans and the second generation of country strategic plans. The following lessons and recommendations aim to help support the necessary change.

Key lessons

66. The following six lessons arise from the evidence above.
67. **Nomenclature matters** – There is a lack of clarity regarding “what is” a policy, strategy, action plan, update or policy statement that is far from semantic; designations determine procedures such as consultation and approval, content, accountability and internal status and therefore have consequences for programming, particularly at the field level. Clarity of designation provides staff with clear parameters and also a defense against ad hoc policy requests, as designations are linked with (and integral to) policy initiation triggers.
68. **Alignment with WFP absorptive capacity is key** – Even for a large-scale organization such as WFP, the use and application of 33 separate policies is challenging. For overstretched staff working under difficult operating conditions at the regional and country levels absorptive capacity is even more restricted. The range and breadth of WFP policies need to correspond to its ability to absorb them, mindful of the organization’s heavy burden of emergency response work.
69. **Policies need common standards and expectations for content** – Policies for different issues necessarily vary in their approaches and strategies. Nonetheless (and depending on policy designation) there must be common minimum requirements if policy quality is to be assured. These include a sound evidence base, robust accountability arrangements, adequately assessed and committed human and financial resources and a sound and realistic implementation plan that includes dissemination.

²⁵ See, for example: WFP. 2018. “Summary evaluation report on WFP’s policies on humanitarian principles and access in humanitarian contexts during the period 2004–2017.” (WFP/EB.A/2018/7-C).

²⁶ Noted also in Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network. 2019. *MOPAN 2017–18 assessments: World Food Programme*. <http://www.mopanonline.org/assessments/wfp2017-18/WFP%20report%20final.pdf>.

70. **Policy accountability is the foundation** – The risks of uncertain or dispersed accountability are clearly highlighted in the policy evaluations examined here. As well as strong technical and political scrutiny, policies require full accountability systems, which range from the firm assignment of responsibilities to dedicated managers at different levels of the organization, with associated reporting requirements, to Executive Board oversight.
71. **Policy coherence helps avoid confusion and competition** – Policy overlaps create at best opportunities and at worst confusion and competition. Generalized statements of “coherence with” other policies do not provide sufficient rigour, nor do they help clarify the normative hierarchy. A foundational approach to coherence and coordination that considers synergies to be not merely desirable but rather a fundamental part of policy development and implementation reduces these risks.
72. **Policies require more than standalone documents** – Policies should not exist in a vacuum. As forward-looking statements of durable organizational commitment, they require full and visible corporate leadership, momentum and resources. They require reinforcement through implementation-level guidance and requirements, supported by comprehensive accountability systems.

Recommendations

73. The six recommendations below (tables 8.A and 8.B) are aimed at supporting the rebuilding of an enabling policy environment within WFP. They build on Office of Evaluations’ top 10 Lessons for policy quality. All are pending the findings of the ongoing mid-term review of the strategic plan and informal consultations with the Executive Board on the Strategic Plan (2022–2026). The recommendations are presented in two groups. The first group (in table 8.A) includes strategic recommendations with a focus on the policy cycle, with a view to their implementation in a way that supports the development and execution of the next strategic plan. The second group (in table 8.B) consists of operational recommendations for more immediate and short-term action.

TABLE 8.A: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS – TO CONTRIBUTE TO, AND SUPPORT, THE STRATEGIC PLAN (2022–2026)			
Recommendation	Specific actions	Timing	Responsible
1. Clarify and confirm the policy cycle procedure	<p>Update the 2011 policy formulation document to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ a set of definitions that differentiate between WFP rules and regulations, strategies, policies, guidance notes, etc. and includes definitions for each item; ➤ a clear policy typology that clarifies the normative hierarchy and differentiates between (at a minimum) programmatic, cross-cutting and corporate thematic documents; ➤ updated classifications of policies for submission to the Executive Board, whether for approval, consideration or information; ➤ defined criteria for when a policy (as opposed to another document type) will be triggered; ➤ A revised policy cycle, including the accountability lines for different types of documents (see recommendation 2, below); and ➤ requirement for a policy timespan of five years, at which point approval – following an evaluation – should be required for its revision, updating or decommissioning (see recommendation 2). 	By June 2021	Director, Policy and Programmes Division (as chair of the policy cycle task force) Executive Board Secretariat
2. Clarify policy governance and accountability procedures	<p>2a. Confirm responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) activating a policy for any given issue (rather than leaving the responsibility with individual units); ii) ensuring policy coherence through the policy framework (see recommendation 3, below); and iii) approving strategies and providing provisional approval for policies prior to Executive Board approval (for all policies). <p>2b. Require a regular interface – through the Policy and Programme Division and the Executive Board Secretariat – with the Executive Board in relation to policy approvals and updates on implementation.</p> <p>2c. Confirm the process for policy decommissioning.</p>	By February 2021	Director, Policy and Programmes Division (as chair of the policy cycle task force); Executive Management Group; Executive Board Secretariat

TABLE 8.A: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS – TO CONTRIBUTE TO, AND SUPPORT, THE STRATEGIC PLAN (2022–2026)			
Recommendation	Specific actions	Timing	Responsible
3. Define the policy universe through an updated WFP policy framework, applying coherence as a key principle	<p>3a. Applying the typology within the updated policy formulation document above, rationalize (including decommissioning/merging where appropriate) the range of WFP policies.^a</p> <p>3b. Reflect the resulting streamlined set of policies in a WFP policy framework aligned with the current strategic plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) determines substantive coverage of key issues by policy, strategy etc.; ii) identifies thematic intersections (e.g. between school feeding, social protection and capacity strengthening) and fills relevant policy gaps; iii) identifies the coverage (and gaps) of cross-cutting themes such as gender, protection and the humanitarian principles; and iv) clearly specifies areas of internal and external policy coherence. 	By June 2021	Director, Policy and Programmes Division (as chair of the policy cycle task force)

^aFor example, a set of approximately 20 policies would be within the range of the policy frameworks of other United Nations agencies.

TABLE 8.B: OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS, FOR IMMEDIATE SHORT-TERM			
Recommendation	Specific actions	Timing	Responsible
4. Adopt a “policy-building” approach with clarified standards for staff	<p>4a. Require all new policies being developed to adopt a “policy-building” approach that draws together a comprehensive evidence base and consultation with employees at all levels.</p> <p>4b. Include in the revised policy formulation document (or an Executive Director circular) mandatory requirements for all policies, such as an analytical basis, a vision and theory of change, positioning in relation to other actors, accountabilities and reporting mechanisms, a results framework and financial requirements.^a</p> <p>4c. Require peer review of new policies coming on stream by technical experts and the policy cycle task force.</p> <p>4d. Clarify the essential “implementation package” required by policies, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) an agreed roll-out plan reflecting the various levels of implementation (headquarters, regional, country-specific); ii) a dissemination and communication strategy, internal and external; iii) guidance documents; iv) a funding and human resources strategy; and v) a monitoring and evaluation plan. 	By February 2021	Director, Policy and Programme Division (as chair of the policy cycle task force)
5. Overhaul the current policy compendium	<p>Replace the current policy compendium presented to the Board each year with annual updates to the policy framework, also to be presented to the Board. These should comprise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ qualitative insights into areas of progress, outstanding gaps, etc., with a particular focus on systemic issues; and ➤ updated information on progress against evaluation recommendation implementation. 	By November 2020	Director, Policy and Programme Division (as chair of the policy cycle task force)

TABLE 8.B: OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS, FOR IMMEDIATE SHORT-TERM			
Recommendation	Specific actions	Timing	Responsible
6. Review the processes for developing high-quality management responses to evaluations and ensuring follow-up actions on evaluation recommendations	<p>6a. Conduct business process mapping of the steps required to prepare management responses to evaluations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ providing mechanisms for quality checking the relevance and feasibility of proposed follow-up actions; ➤ ensuring cross-functional responsibilities for issues requiring systemic change; ➤ ensuring that management responses to individual policy evaluations are reviewed for internal coherence; and ➤ establishing appropriate timelines for developing management responses. <p>6b. For follow-up on actions agreed to in response to evaluation recommendations, and taking account of the existing commitment to revamp the corporate management response system, consider including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ standards for reporting on progress against evaluation recommendations; ➤ provision and verification of supporting evidence; ➤ formal review of progress by the EMG (including systems for escalation where agreed actions are insufficiently addressed); and ➤ progress reporting, including quantitative assessment and qualitative analysis of performance and gaps. 	By June 2021	Director, Corporate Planning and Performance

^a The Office of Evaluation's top 10 lessons for policy quality documents will be revised to incorporate new learning from this synthesis and could be used as a reference for policy quality requirements.

ANNEX

Features present in policies

Key

- Feature fully present in policy
- Feature partially present in policy
- Feature not present in policy or present to only a limited degree
- Blank: No evidence

POLICY AREA AND YEAR OF ISSUE											
Area	Specific feature	School feeding	Gender	Cash and vouchers	Nutrition	Capacity development	Corporate partnerships	Humanitarian protection	Humanitarian principles	Humanitarian access	Safety nets
		2009	2008	2008	2012	2009	2014	2012	2004	2006	2012
Policy coherence	Reflecting prevailing trends and debate	•••	••		•••	•••	•••	•••			•••
	Coherence with current strategic plan	•••	•	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••	•••
	Internal consistency with other policy areas	•	•	••	•		•	••	••	••	•
Corporate leadership and ownership	Sufficient corporate leadership and management ownership	•••	•	•	••	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Sufficient staff awareness and ownership	•	•	•	•••	••	•	•••	••	••	•

POLICY AREA AND YEAR OF ISSUE											
Area	Specific feature	School feeding	Gender	Cash and vouchers	Nutrition	Capacity development	Corporate partnerships	Humanitarian protection	Humanitarian principles	Humanitarian access	Safety nets
		2009	2008	2008	2012	2009	2014	2012	2004	2006	2012
Policy design and implementation	Consultation during design	...	...	.	...	.	..	...	.	...	.
	Production of high-quality guidance	...	.	...	..	.	...	.	.	.	...
	Presence and use of evidence	.	.	.	.	..		...			...
	Clear goals and vision	.	.	.	...	.	...	.	.	.	.
	Clear and consistent use of terminology	...	.	...	.	.	...	.	..	...	.
	Incorporation of gender into design			.	.	.	.	...	..	..	.
	Adequate policy dissemination	.	.	.		.	.	...	.	.	..
	Inclusion of action or implementation plan	...	...	.	.	...	...	...	.	.	.
	Adequate human resources	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	..	..	.
	Sufficient staff skills and expertise	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	Adequate financial resources	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Presence of robust results framework	..	..	.	..	..	..	.	.	.	.

POLICY AREA AND YEAR OF ISSUE											
Area	Specific feature	School feeding	Gender	Cash and vouchers	Nutrition	Capacity development	Corporate partnerships	Humanitarian protection	Humanitarian principles	Humanitarian access	Safety nets
		2009	2008	2008	2012	2009	2014	2012	2004	2006	2012
	Robust monitoring and reporting systems in place	.	.	...	.	.	.	..	..	..	.
	Clear corporate responsibilities and accountabilities assigned	.	.	.	.	..	..	..	.	.	...
	Partnership arrangements in place to support policy implementation	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	..