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

Comprehensive management response to the evaluation of the WFP response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the comprehensive management response (WFP/EB.A/2022/7-E/Rev.2) to the recommendations set out in the summary report on the evaluation of the WFP response to the COVID-19 pandemic (WFP/EB.1/2022/6-B) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

Background

1. This document presents the WFP management response to the items for consideration identified in the summary report on the evaluation of the WFP response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic.
2. The evaluation asked three questions, which were aimed at exploring the adaptive capacity of WFP under pandemic conditions:
 - i) How well did the enabling environment and organizational assets of WFP adapt to respond to the demands of the COVID-19 crisis?
 - ii) How well did WFP fulfil its role as a partner in the collective humanitarian response?
 - iii) What was achieved, and what was learned?

* 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.

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3. The evaluation was conducted under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, including WFP operating in emergency mode; travel and movement restrictions; and the need to avoid unduly burdening country offices. Accordingly, it adopted a “retrospective developmental” design, which focused on providing evidence to support adaptation in dynamic environments. This involved the application of three principles:
 - i) prioritizing organizational learning needs;
 - ii) ensuring consultation and evidence sharing with stakeholders throughout; and
 - iii) integrating with the surrounding evidence-building environment.
4. WFP welcomes the evaluation’s overall conclusion that it provided a “high-quality strategic and operational” response that was, overall, “agile and adaptive”. The conclusion provides evidence that, prima facie, WFP’s emergency preparedness, although designed for local and regional responses, can – with enhancements – be effective in dealing with significant global emergencies of unanticipated nature, momentum and impact. WFP will continue to work to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the services that it provides.
5. The evaluation presented six items for WFP to consider as it moves forward in the implementation of its strategic plan for 2022–2025, recognizing that the organization is already engaging with recommendations from the strategic evaluation of its capacity to respond to emergencies.
6. As a result of the “retrospective developmental” approach, which provided overworked staff with the opportunity to be debriefed while issues were still fresh, many of the most important considerations have already been acted upon; the related actions have been completed and are summarized in annex I. Additional planned actions are listed in annex II. Considering the cross-cutting nature of the considerations put forward in the evaluation, and the fact that this was WFP’s first global response, management will hold a cross-functional workshop once the results of the interagency humanitarian evaluation of the COVID-19 response are published; that workshop will be aimed at ensuring that broader lessons learned are taken into account by the relevant functions.
7. A further oral update on the management response to the evaluation of WFP’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic will be provided at the 2022 second regular session of the Executive Board; that update will take into account the results of the interagency humanitarian evaluation of the COVID-19 response, which are due to be published in October 2022.

ANNEX I

Completed actions

The following actions have already been completed. The lead office and completion date for each action are shown in brackets in the subheadings.

Item 1 for consideration: Reposition WFP as a key actor in COVID-19 recovery

1. **WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025** (Programme and Policy Development Department (PD), plan approved at the 2021 second regular session of the Board)

In the months following the onset of the pandemic, WFP launched a medium-term programme framework, which established WFP's contribution to long-term response and recovery efforts and supported regional bureaux and country offices in developing the new programme models and types of partnership and resourcing necessary to achieve the objectives of the framework. WFP was able to increasingly integrate systems-strengthening and "enabling" functions into its work. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored WFP's critical role not only in short-term response but also in enhancing governments' long-term ability to respond to critical shocks. WFP works increasingly through a "twin-track" approach combining the delivery of assistance with knowledge transfers and technical assistance that strengthen national social protection, nutrition, food security and resilience systems.

WFP's new strategic plan, for 2022–2025, expands on its long-term response and recovery programming, which is relevant to mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and enabling countries to "build back better". One of the guiding principles of WFP's strategic plan is "programme-integration", committing WFP to the "layering", integration and sequencing of humanitarian and development programmes. These efforts will meet people's urgent food security, nutrition and other essential needs while strengthening their long-term resilience to shocks and stressors.

Outcomes 4 and 5 of the strategic plan reinforce WFP's role as an integral contributor to the COVID-19 recovery.

WFP's ability to strengthen national systems, build resilience and deliver long-term impact depends on the availability of multi-year and flexible funding. WFP's strategic plan therefore outlines financing as one of its enablers, advocating flexible funding as essential to a more agile response and the bolstering of sustainable assistance in protracted crisis. With many low- and middle-income countries facing rising debt burdens, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP's strategic plan positions WFP to scale up debt swaps as a tool for mobilizing new resources for essential programmes, allowing host governments to reduce sovereign debt so that they can devote resources to their own social safety nets and national development while strengthening strategic partnerships with creditors and debtors.

2. **Updated 2022 gender policy** (Gender Office, policy approved at the 2022 first regular session of the Board)

The gender policy outlines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as one of the three drivers (along with conflict and climate change) of the erosion of gender equality and women's empowerment around the globe, with a widening gender gap in food security and 10 percent more women than men likely to be food-insecure in 2021, compared with 6 percent in 2019. COVID-19 increased the time required to close the gender equality gap from 99.5 years in 2019 to 135.6 years in 2020. During the pandemic, women were more likely than men to have lost livelihoods and employment and continued to perform the majority of care work, while the risk of early and forced child marriage increased with school closures, especially for girls.

The updated 2022 gender policy is aligned with the recommendation on going beyond the humanitarian–development divide and addressing structural vulnerabilities. While recognizing that the first imperative in humanitarian work is to do no harm, the policy states that the growing number of protracted crises and recurrent shocks demands a more long-term focus and that addressing the root causes of gender inequality is critical to both humanitarian and resilience work in facilitating equitable access to and control over food security and nutrition within and among communities. The policy also recognizes that barriers to women’s economic empowerment are one of the structural vulnerabilities that impede gender equality and food security. It therefore calls for increased focus and action on WFP’s work to advance economic, digital and financial inclusion and strengthen key partnerships with regard to such work, recognizing that WFP operates within an ecosystem of stakeholders and actors, including those involved in shock-responsive social protection systems in which gender needs to be considered in the targeting and delivery of assistance.

3. **Strengthening of national social protection systems** (PD and Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, completed)

With regard to social protection, the Assistant Executive Director, PD, participated actively in the United Nations Sustainable Development Group task team on the COVID-19 socioeconomic response and recovery, within which WFP and the United Nations Children’s Fund co-led a workstream on social protection and social services.

Within the medium-term programme framework described in the subsection on the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025, WFP contributed to the strengthening of national social protection systems in 78 countries, supporting governments in 65 of those countries in the introduction of new, and the scale-up or adaptation of existing, social protection measures in response to COVID-19.

Item 2 for consideration: Systems enabler

4. **Establishment of a humanitarian logistics services unit** (Supply Chain Operations Division (SCO), completed)

SCO established a Humanitarian Logistics Services Unit (HLS) that aims to reposition WFP as a trusted, reliable partner for the provision of supply chain services in emergency settings.

Item 3 for consideration: Increase advocacy

5. **WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025, section 5.6, on contributing to advocacy and partnerships** (Partnerships and Advocacy Department (PA), plan approved at the 2021 second regular session of the Board)

Advocacy is at the centre of WFP’s partnerships and engagement strategy and is fully embedded in the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025, allowing the organization to influence key policy- and decision making.

6. **Advocacy work built on strong, new and/or strategic partnerships** (PA, December 2021)

WFP’s advocacy work includes the participation in a roundtable event with the Nutrition Japan Public–Private Platform – a network of Japan’s public and private sector leaders – prior to the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit 2021. This has increased the visibility of WFP as a partner of choice in partnership and technical capacity in nutrition, particularly for the Japanese nutrition and food industry. Another example is that of the International Chamber of Commerce, which became a WFP partner in 2021 and with which the Partnerships and Advocacy Department jointly convened a private sector consultation on approaches to food systems as part of the development of the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025. More than 30 business leaders provided insights during the consultation, and WFP has gained access to the International Chamber of Commerce network of approximately 45 million companies in

100 countries. Such collaboration strengthens WFP's ability to address the complex challenges facing the global community.

7. Advocacy skills training for key staff, especially senior management at the country and regional levels (Communications, Advocacy and Marketing Division (CAM), June 2021)

Ten advocacy training events had been organized by the end of 2021, with 295 participating staff members including senior staff from regional and country-level communications, advocacy and marketing, programme and partnership units. Each event attracted between 30 and 50 participants from country offices and regional bureaux and aimed to foster an appetite for advocacy and an understanding of advocacy's added value in the achievement of WFP's mission. The workshops enabled participants to understand the processes involved in developing advocacy plans and to identify or create opportunities to influence national and regional policies, programmes and practices aimed at achieving zero hunger.

8. Advocacy advisory services (March 2022)

CAM supported two regional bureaux (those for Southern Africa and Western Africa) with the deployment of advocacy advisory services.

9. Leveraging the enhanced partnerships built during the pandemic (Strategic Partnerships Division, completed)

The Strategic Partnerships Division provided regional bureaux and country offices with [guidance](#) on how to identify and design context-specific common messages that are in line with and support national objectives and priorities.

Item 4 for consideration: Create a shared overview and anticipate management arrangements

10. Emergency activation protocol (Emergency Operations Division (EME), 1 February 2022)

The new emergency activation protocol was designed specifically to provide "empowered leadership" as close to operations as possible. EME will conduct an after-action review during or at the end of every corporate scale-up. The effectiveness of the empowered leadership will be assessed as part of that review process.

11. Strategic Resource Allocation Committee (leadership group and appointed members, 1 January 2022)

The Strategic Resource Allocation Committee has been replaced by the global review committee and the multilateral budget committee, which have greater field representation.

12. Establishment of global operations meetings (EME, completed)

Bimonthly global operations meetings with regional directors have been established to facilitate the sharing of information and concerns at the global level.

13. After-action review (EME, 1 February 2022)

The capture of lessons learned is an integral part of the emergency activation protocol (paragraph 35 and annex IX paragraph 4), requiring the Director of Emergencies to carry out an after-action review, either during a response or following the deactivation of a corporate scale-up.

14. Standardized approach to programme support and administrative budget allocation (Operations Management Support Office, completed as of 2022 programme support and administrative budget allocation)

A standardized approach to the allocation of funding from the programme support and administrative budget has been established to guarantee a consistent staffing structure and

a “backbone” of essential functional staff at the country office level in any operational environment.

Item 5 for consideration: Ensure resilient but adaptive systems

15. Replacement of Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 emergency designations (EME, February 2022)

A recent Executive Director’s circular on the emergency activation protocol replaces the Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 emergency designations with new emergency phases and asserts WFP’s ability to proactively anticipate, prepare for and respond to emergencies with speed and agility. The revised protocol adheres to the “no regrets” approach to emergency response promoted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, empowers leaders with decision-making authority and accountability, and improves access to human, administrative, financial and material resources.

16. New immediate scale-up revision (EME, March 2022)

A new immediate scale-up revision enables the release of funds through the WFP Information Network and Global System to enable WFP to initiate a scaled response to a sudden-onset emergency within 72 hours. The revision is actioned at headquarters, freeing up country office capacity for the initial response.

17. New corporate alert system (EME, February 2022)

The new corporate alert system consolidates various alert and analysis products – the previous corporate alert system, the global operations overview and the early warning watchlist – creating a single alert system that is aligned with the new emergency activation protocol. It consolidates the most recent quantitative and qualitative information, provides a global overview of WFP operations and highlights the countries and topics of greatest corporate concern. The system also helps to prioritize advance financing for country offices with significant funding gaps.

18. Risk management (EME, February 2022)

Risk management is an integral part of the new emergency activation protocol that supports risk-informed decision making during emergency response scale-up activities through a pragmatic and structured approach to risk management. It sets out a clear framework aimed at enabling personnel to take calculated risks and apply mitigation measures that help WFP to achieve its strategic emergency objectives.

Item 6 for consideration: Adopt an ethos of staff care

19. WFP people policy (Workplace Culture Department, June 2021)

The people policy provides a vision of the future workforce and an all-embracing framework for people management and workplace culture at WFP. Promulgated through an Executive Director’s circular of 27 August 2021, it instructs all directors and heads of office to review the existing instruments, strategies, frameworks and action plans in their units to bring them into line with the policy. This is a comprehensive and iterative process aimed at achieving long-term and sustainable change. Implementation of the policy, including WFP’s commitment to being a caring and supportive employer, is facilitated and supported by a dedicated team that forms part of the WFP people and culture coordination units established by the Workplace Culture Department on 1 January 2022.

20. Staffing framework (Human Resources Division (HRM), September 2021)

WFP issued a new corporate staffing framework through an Executive Director's circular of 15 September 2021. The circular establishes a comprehensive framework that provides an overview of the employee categories and contract modalities that can be used. Supporting a nimble and flexible workforce, the framework sets out principles and criteria that guide managers on which contract modalities should be used in various circumstances, including the modalities that best help to meet WFP's short-to-medium-term needs while providing competitive and fair employment conditions for employees currently on short-term contracts.

21. Service contract conversion exercise (HRM, March 2022)

Directly related to the new staffing framework and covering the broader issue of the use of short-term contract modalities for long-term work, WFP implemented a service contract conversion exercise that is now complete. After a thorough review, more than 2,500 long-serving national employees on temporary contracts were found to be eligible for conversion to fixed-term contracts, and more than 2,100 were approved for conversion.

ANNEX II

Planned actions

Item for consideration	Item lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Management response	Actions to be taken	Action lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Action deadline
<p>1. Reposition WFP as a key actor in COVID-19 recovery.</p> <p>The experience of the pandemic has highlighted the futility of the humanitarian-development divide – particularly in contexts that involve multiple shocks and stressors – and reinforced the importance of the humanitarian–development–peace nexus. WFP has expressed its intention, for example in its strategic plan for 2022–2025, to work on structural vulnerabilities through resilience activities among other things.</p> <p>The increase in demand for WFP social protection expertise – beyond support for cash transfers as an emergency response – presents a major opportunity to reposition WFP as an integral part of the COVID-19 recovery.</p>	<p>Programme and Policy Development Department (PD)</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>1. WFP is committed to the operationalization of the recent WFP social protection strategy, which includes increased investment in WFP's global, regional and country-level capacity to deliver social protection expertise in support of countries' recovery from COVID-19 and the strengthening of national systems. An implementation plan is being finalized, with specific timebound activities covering workforce development; partnerships and funding; knowledge and learning management; cross-functional support and coherence; and monitoring and reporting. Costs will be included in corporate budgeting processes.</p>	<p>Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division</p>	<p>Fourth quarter of 2022 onwards</p>

Item for consideration	Item lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Management response	Actions to be taken	Action lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Action deadline
			and through on-demand service provision. The latter includes support for partners such as the Global Fund, the World Bank, the World Health Organization and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. By designing and providing efficient and tailored supply chain services that enable partners to achieve their own programmatic goals, HLS aims to position WFP as a trusted, reliable partner for supply chain service provision in emergency settings.		
<p>3. Increase advocacy.</p> <p>WFP has increased its advocacy work throughout the pandemic and become increasingly visible in high-level forums. This enhanced visibility can be leveraged for good, building on strong partnerships at the country level in particular.</p>	Partnerships and Advocacy Department (PA) Communications, Advocacy and Marketing Division (CAM), Office of Political Strategy (OPS), Public Partnerships and Resourcing Division (PPR), Private Partnerships and Fundraising Division (PPF)	Agreed	1. WFP will continue to increase its advocacy work by building on strong partnerships, engaging new partners (both public and private), and contributing to a wide spectrum of high-level forums and events that are relevant to its food security and global nutrition mission, including through strategic engagement with national stakeholders and Board members to strengthen visibility-enhancing and fundraising efforts. Regular reporting on achievements, including to the Board, will be provided, including through the CAM annual report, regular PPF updates on the private sector funding strategy for 2020–2025 and the annual performance report.	PA (PPR, PPF, Strategic Partnerships Division (STR), PD)	By December 2025

Item for consideration	Item lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Management response	Actions to be taken	Action lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Action deadline
			<p>2. Following virtual field visits and the provision of guidance and toolkits to country offices and regional bureaux in 2021, WFP will seek to organize virtual visits to other countries, focusing on the effects of the Ukraine crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic on food prices in its advocacy work with parliamentarians in key donor countries, if security and access conditions allow meaningful engagement with country office staff and beneficiaries. WFP envisages such virtual visits continuing even after conflict- and COVID-19-related constraints have been lifted, as they represent a cost-effective approach to global advocacy.</p> <p>3. The Group of 20 (G20) event held in Brindisi, Italy, in 2021 drew attention to supply chain challenges and to WFP's role in overcoming them. WFP will seek to continue the discussion of those topics during the new G20 presidency in 2022.</p> <p>4. Actions to increase advocacy skills training for key staff, especially senior management at the country and regional levels, include CAM's ongoing development of online advocacy training, due to be finalized in the second quarter of 2022. The training will be open to all WFP employees responsible for advocacy or external engagement, and will explore in greater depth some of the concepts discussed at the initial training events and workshops (such as influencing policy), based on feedback from participants.</p>	<p>OPS (PPR)</p> <p>PPR (OPS, STR)</p> <p>CAM (Advocacy Unit)</p>	<p>By December 2022</p> <p>By December 2022</p> <p>Online training package English version by June 2022; Arabic, French and Spanish versions by August 2022</p>

Item for consideration	Item lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Management response	Actions to be taken	Action lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Action deadline
			<p>5. Leveraging the enhanced partnerships built during the pandemic, actions aimed at engaging with partners on advocacy agendas, identifying common concerns and seeking common messages include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ updating guidance for regional bureaux and country offices on how to identify and design context-specific common messages that are aligned with and support national objectives and priorities; ➤ providing regional bureaux and country offices with strategic guidance on and support for resourcing approaches aimed at meeting their unmet needs, using structured and consistent dialogue and tailored tools such as the partnership action plans within the programme review and approval process, dashboards on priority operations, and the new Tableau visualization tool; and ➤ leveraging technology, expertise and partnerships in the public and private sectors and with international financial institutions. A first contribution agreement with Takeda signed in 2020 enabled WFP to construct a United Nations isolation and treatment centre in Accra and a control tower for the end-to-end tracking of humanitarian cargo movements. A second phase of the partnership aims to enable WFP to strengthen health supply chains in four African countries over five years. The total value of the partnership is USD 5.2 million. 	<p>STR</p> <p>PPR</p> <p>PPF</p>	<p>By December 2022</p> <p>Support for the development of partnership action plans by the end of 2025 Tableau dashboard version 2.0 by June 2022</p> <p>Phase I completed Phase II completed by January 2026</p>

Item for consideration	Item lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Management response	Actions to be taken	Action lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Action deadline
<p>4. Create a shared overview and anticipate management arrangements.</p> <p>The lack of a shared overview of the pandemic, and what was needed for an effective response to it, highlighted the challenges of a globally diverse emergency. It also impeded decision making, with mechanisms set up for a typical regional or country-level response. Anticipating potential local diversity within large-scale or global emergencies and deciding “how to decide” in such situations will help facilitate the design and implementation of effective measures into relevant future responses.</p>	Operations Management Support Office, (EME)	Agreed	All actions related to this item for consideration have been completed. See annex I for details.		-

Item for consideration	Item lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Management response	Actions to be taken	Action lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Action deadline
<p>5. Ensure resilient and adaptive systems.</p> <p>WFP found during the pandemic that many of its systems were able to adapt while others, such as those for country strategic plan revisions and some internal financial management systems, struggled. Standard systems need to be adaptable when a large-scale emergency strikes, and flexibility must be built in and stress tested.</p>	<p>EME (Corporate Planning and Performance Division, Human Resources Division (HRM), PA, PPR, Corporate Finance Division, Enterprise Risk Management Division)</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In accordance with a revised Immediate Response Account (IRA) circular, the IRA will serve as a single central consolidated mechanism for funding crisis response that links the corporate alert system, early warning and anticipatory action and preparedness and response activities in support of life-saving interventions. The circular will outline a sustainability plan in which the IRA is regularly replenished to ensure the predictable and timely release of funds to country offices in times of need, with country directors, regional directors and corporate response directors having direct decision making authority by virtue of increased delegations of authority. 2. A new Executive Director's circular on surge capacity will clarify organization-wide responsibilities for ensuring sufficient surge capacity and the end-to-end process of requesting and deploying staff. 	<p>EME (Corporate Planning and Performance Division, PA, PPR, Corporate Finance Division)</p> <p>EME (HRM)</p>	<p>June 2022</p> <p>July 2022</p>

Item for consideration	Item lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Management response	Actions to be taken	Action lead office (supporting offices in brackets)	Action deadline
<p>6. Adopt an ethos of staff care.</p> <p>Beyond a people policy or staff wellness, how can WFP best support its staff, confirm their identity as part of the WFP family and make them feel a sense of organizational commitment to their well-being? Staff care requires systems – contractual arrangements, progression guarantees and others, many of which are out of WFP’s hands – as well as workplace culture and management skills, whose limitations have been highlighted during the pandemic.</p> <p>If WFP’s organizational bloodstream is its systems, processes and technical capacities, then its heart is its people. Their experience of, and contribution to, the many intangible elements that constitute a humanitarian response should be maximized at all levels.</p>	<p>Workplace Culture Department, (HRM, Staff Wellness Division, People and Culture Coordination Unit)</p>	<p>Partially agreed</p>	<p>The WFP people policy is the corporate policy to frame excellence in people management. It applies to all employees and reflects the importance of making WFP a more nimble, flexible, performing, improving, diverse, inclusive, caring and supportive organization. All actions mentioned in this part of the management response to the evaluation are included under the umbrella of this policy.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement the WFP people policy. 2. Review policies, strategies and plans to ensure alignment with the policy. 3. Implement the human resources strategy. 4. Implement the wellness strategy for 2020–2024. 5. Complete the full transition to the new WFP staffing framework. 6. Review and issue a new policy on consultants. 7. Complete and evaluate the “new ways of working” pilot, testing a hybrid working model in a limited number of offices (subject to any constraints imposed by the pandemic). 	<p>People and Culture Coordination Unit (All directors and heads of office) HRM Staff Wellness Division HRM (All offices) HRM HRM (Innovation and Knowledge Management Division, participating offices and divisions)</p>	<p>Ongoing – review of change management process by June 2023</p> <p>December 2025</p> <p>Ongoing – review by January 2025</p> <p>December 2024</p> <p>June 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p>

Acronyms

CAM	Communications, Advocacy and Marketing Division
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
EME	Emergency Operations Division
HLS	Humanitarian Logistics Services Unit
HRM	Human Resources Division
IRA	Immediate Response Account
OPS	Office of Political Strategy
PA	Partnerships and Advocacy Department
PD	Programme and Policy Development Department
PPF	Private Partnerships and Fundraising Division
PPR	Public Partnerships and Resourcing Division
SCO	Supply Chain Operations Division
STR	Strategic Partnerships Division