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**Executive Board
First Regular Session**

Rome, 13–15 February 2012

EVALUATION REPORTS

Agenda item 6

For consideration

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Distribution: GENERAL
WFP/EB.1/2012/6-D
18 January 2012
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT OF WFP SCHOOL FEEDING POLICY

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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted to the Executive Board for consideration

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

Director, OE*: Ms H. Wedgwood tel.: 066513-2030

Senior Evaluation Officer: Ms S. Burrows tel.: 066513-2519

Should you have any questions regarding availability of documentation for the Executive Board, please contact Ms I. Carpitella, Senior Administrative Assistant, Conference Servicing Unit (tel.: 066513-2645).

* Office of Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The school feeding policy, approved in November 2009, was one of the first policies to follow through the principles of WFP's Strategic Plan 2008–2013. At the time of approval, the Board also mandated the present evaluation of the policy. This evaluation assesses: i) the quality of the policy; ii) progress in early implementation of the policy; and iii) factors influencing progress from which practical lessons are drawn. It is not an evaluation of the impact of school feeding *per se*, but it does address the policy's consistency with emerging evidence of the impact of school feeding. Given the short period since the policy was adopted, this is an assessment of work in progress.

The evaluation focused on school feeding in primary schools, and excluded emergency school feeding. It drew on document and data reviews, interviews with over 300 stakeholders, and case studies of eight countries, which were selected to represent pilot and non-pilot countries, different levels of government management of school feeding systems, and geographical variety.

The evaluation found that the policy responds to a dynamic international context, as well as to strategic developments within WFP. Its adoption was timely, and it was clearly and persuasively written. It was well aligned with the WFP Strategic Plan, other policies and aid-effectiveness principles. It drew on an insightful stock-taking of accumulated evidence relating to the holistic view of school feeding as an instrument of social protection, the need to work towards sustainable government systems, and the possibilities for linking school feeding to agricultural development. Proposing quality standards for school feeding was an important innovation.

The evaluation also found the policy had significant weaknesses: it did not distinguish clearly enough between the general case for school feeding and the specific role(s) that WFP should play in school feeding; its treatment of social protection was too narrow; it drew on solid evidence, but tended to allow advocacy to undermine balanced guidance. It should have emphasized the need to focus each operation on a subset of the multiple objectives of school feeding and the importance of using cost-effectiveness as a criterion, not only in the design of school feeding interventions but also in determining whether to use school feeding or other means to achieve specific outcomes. The practicability of the policy would have been enhanced by including a high-level implementation plan.

It is difficult to attribute results to the policy, because it is recent and because it endorsed many elements of practice existing at the time it was drafted. Nevertheless, the policy is relevant and is already reflected in WFP's portfolio and activities in several positive ways. Radical change, as envisaged by the policy and the overall strategic transformation of WFP that it supports, usually takes time. Successful further implementation depends not only on the advice of the technical units at Headquarters – and the complexity and breadth of the policy makes providing such advice very demanding – but also on organization-wide financing arrangements and incentive structures that are still being put in place.

There is especially room for progress in locating school feeding operations in the safety net/social protection sector, ensuring compliance with WFP nutrition guidance.

The evaluation makes four groups of recommendations that are consistent with the spirit and intent of the policy: i) clarify and update the policy; ii) operationalize the policy more effectively; iii) strengthen the financing of the policy; and iv) intensify learning and further develop the policy.

DRAFT DECISION*

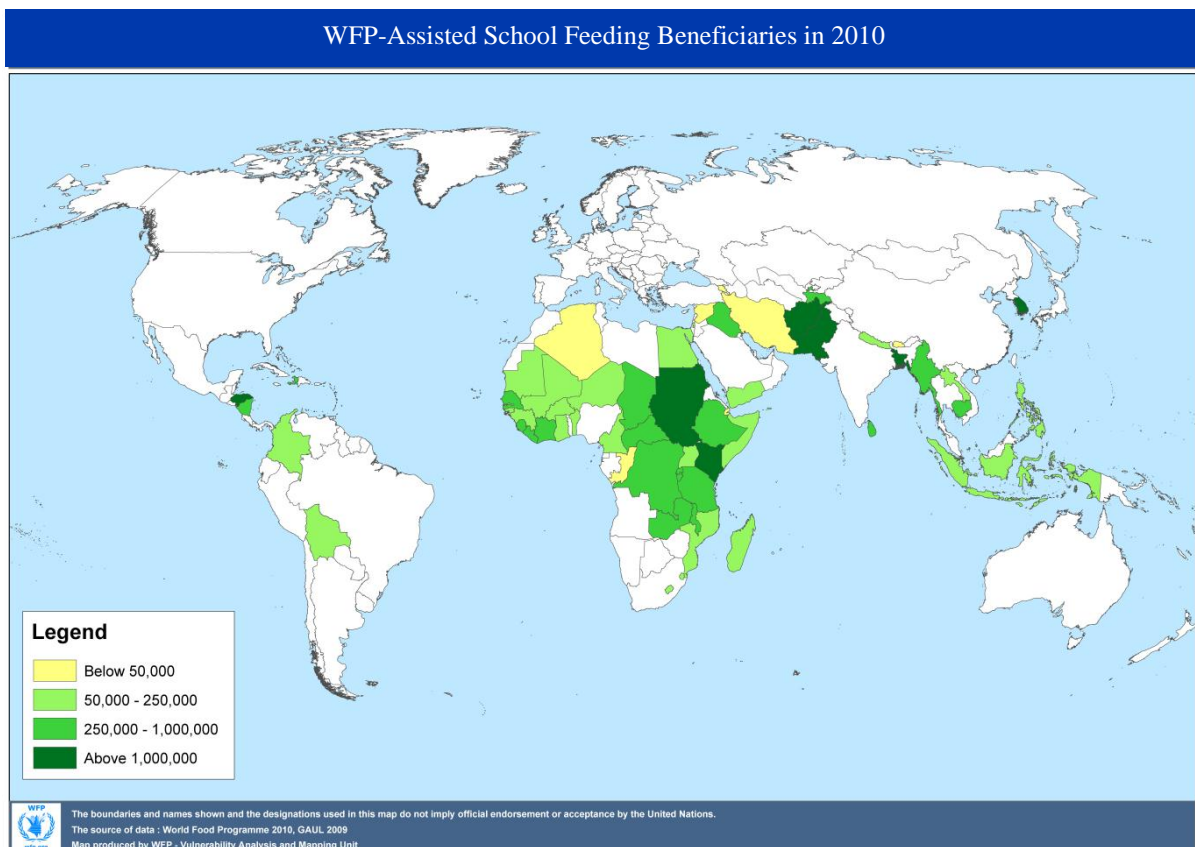
The Board takes note of “Summary Evaluation Report of WFP School Feeding Policy” (WFP/EB.1/2012/6-D) and the management response in WFP/EB.1/2012/6-D/Add.1 and encourages further action on the recommendations, taking into account considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

* 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

WFP Context

1. In recent years WFP school feeding (school meals, biscuits and take-home rations) have reached over 20 million children annually, almost half of them girls.¹ In 2009, WFP invested US\$475 million (14 percent of its budget) on school feeding. The map below shows the extent of WFP school feeding activities in 2010.



2. The school feeding policy was approved by the Board in November 2009. It was one of the first policies to follow through on the principles of WFP's Strategic Plan 2008–2013, and is fully consistent with the plan's orientation towards food assistance and capacity development. Purchase for Progress (P4P) is a relevant but parallel initiative.

Evaluation Objectives and Approach

3. At the time of approval, the Board also mandated an evaluation of the policy to be presented at its first session in 2012. This independent evaluation reviews the quality of the policy and its early implementation and draws practical lessons. It is not an evaluation of the impact of school feeding *per se*, but it does address the policy's consistency with emerging evidence of the impact of school feeding. The terms of reference are such that emergency school feeding is excluded, and the evaluation focuses on primary schools. Even so, the scope is still very wide, because the policy links school feeding to many outcomes. Some of the challenges for the evaluators were the brevity of the period from

¹ WFP Annual Report for 2010.

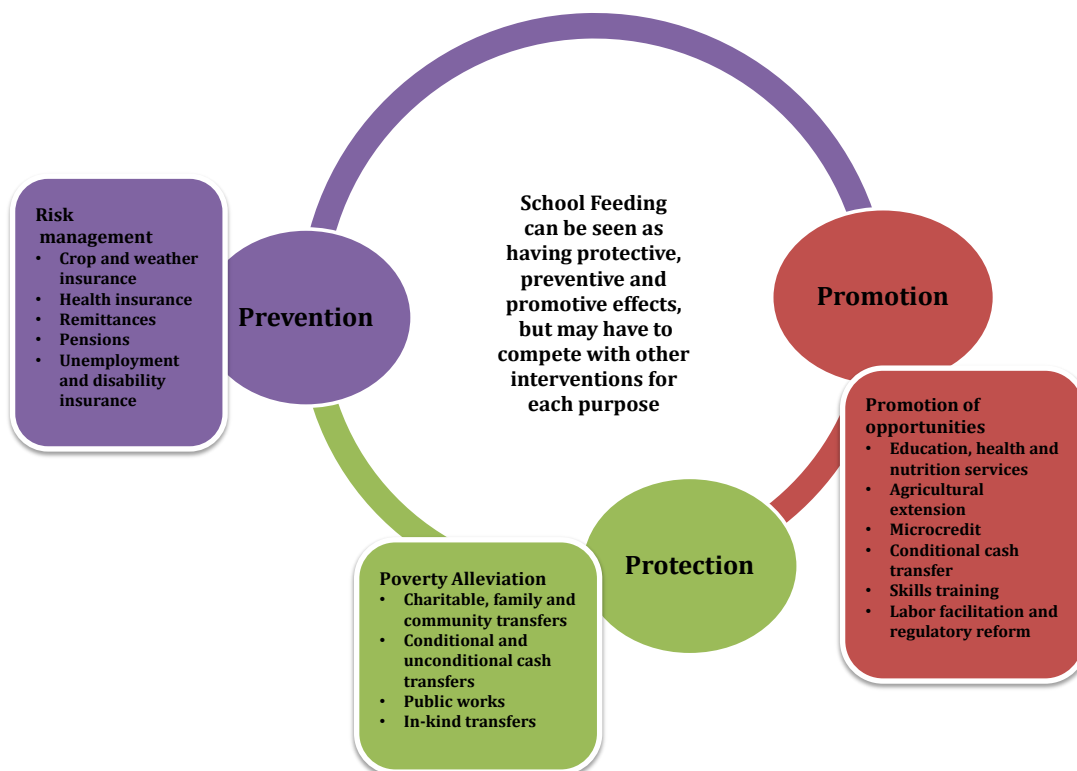
the first adoption of the policy to its evaluation, the complexity of its objectives and the manner in which it combines continuity with innovation.

4. The evaluation took place in April–November 2011 using a methodology and evaluation questions that had been agreed at the inception of the evaluation. It drew on document and data reviews, interviews with over 300 stakeholders, and case studies for eight countries – Afghanistan, Bhutan, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique and Tajikistan – selected to represent pilot and non-pilot countries, different levels of government management of school feeding systems, and geographical variety. A broad reference group across WFP was consulted, and the final report takes account of feedback from a two-day workshop in Rome.

International Context

5. The policy responds to a dynamic international context as well as to strategic developments within WFP. Concerns about aid effectiveness were relevant: despite some progress, the challenges of country ownership and aid predictability remain. The policy identifies multiple school feeding objectives relating to social protection and local economic development, as well as education, health, gender and nutrition. In all these areas, and in matters of aid effectiveness, the international context has been evolving. In particular, international approaches to social protection now tend to consider safety nets in the wider context of the preventive, protective and promotive potential of social protection systems. School feeding, too, can have protective, preventive and promotive effects, but in each dimension it may have to compete with other possible interventions (see Figure 1 below).
6. With respect to nutrition, there is international recognition that, from a life-cycle perspective, the first 1,000 days after conception are crucial. With respect to education, it is recognized that gains in access must be complemented by quality improvements to ensure learning. And there is no doubt of the inter-generational importance of nutrition and education for girls. The Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSF) dimension of the policy, which links school feeding to the promotion of agriculture, is not new but has attracted increased attention.

Figure 1: The 3P framework of social protection



Source: *Building Resilience and Opportunity: Better Livelihoods for the 21st Century. Emerging ideas for the World Bank's 2012–2022 Social Protection and Labor Strategy: For Consultation.* World Bank, Human Development Network, 2011.

Origins of the Policy

- The 2009 policy had no direct predecessor, though WFP's approach to school feeding was embodied in various staff guidelines. Different motivations for preparing the policy converged. The School Feeding Unit saw a need to update, clarify and codify WFP's practical guidance. Several Board members felt that WFP needed to provide a clearer rationale and justification for its school feeding activities. The 2008 food crisis spotlighted school feeding as a safety net that could often be rapidly scaled up, and so suggested a strengthened case for school feeding. It was also logical to review WFP's approach to school feeding in the context of the seminal Strategic Plan (2008–2013).
- A draft of the policy was discussed informally in 2008, but was referred back for further work. The School Feeding Unit was already collaborating with the World Bank and the Partnership for Child Development (PCD). Its response was to redouble efforts to strengthen the evidence base for the policy. The joint publication *Rethinking School Feeding*² was the centrepiece, supported by work on HGSF, a comprehensive review of WFP's school feeding experience and the modeling of school feeding's potential benefits (the "investment case").

² Bundy, D., Burbano, C., Grosh, M., Gelli, A., Jukes, M. and Drake, L. 2009. *Rethinking School Feeding: Social Safety Nets, Child Development and the Education Sector.* Washington, DC, World Bank.

Main Features of the Policy

9. The policy does not spell out WFP’s objectives for school feeding, but its “vision” is tantamount to a goal:

WFP’s vision is to reduce hunger among schoolchildren so that it is not an obstacle to their development. (paragraph 35).

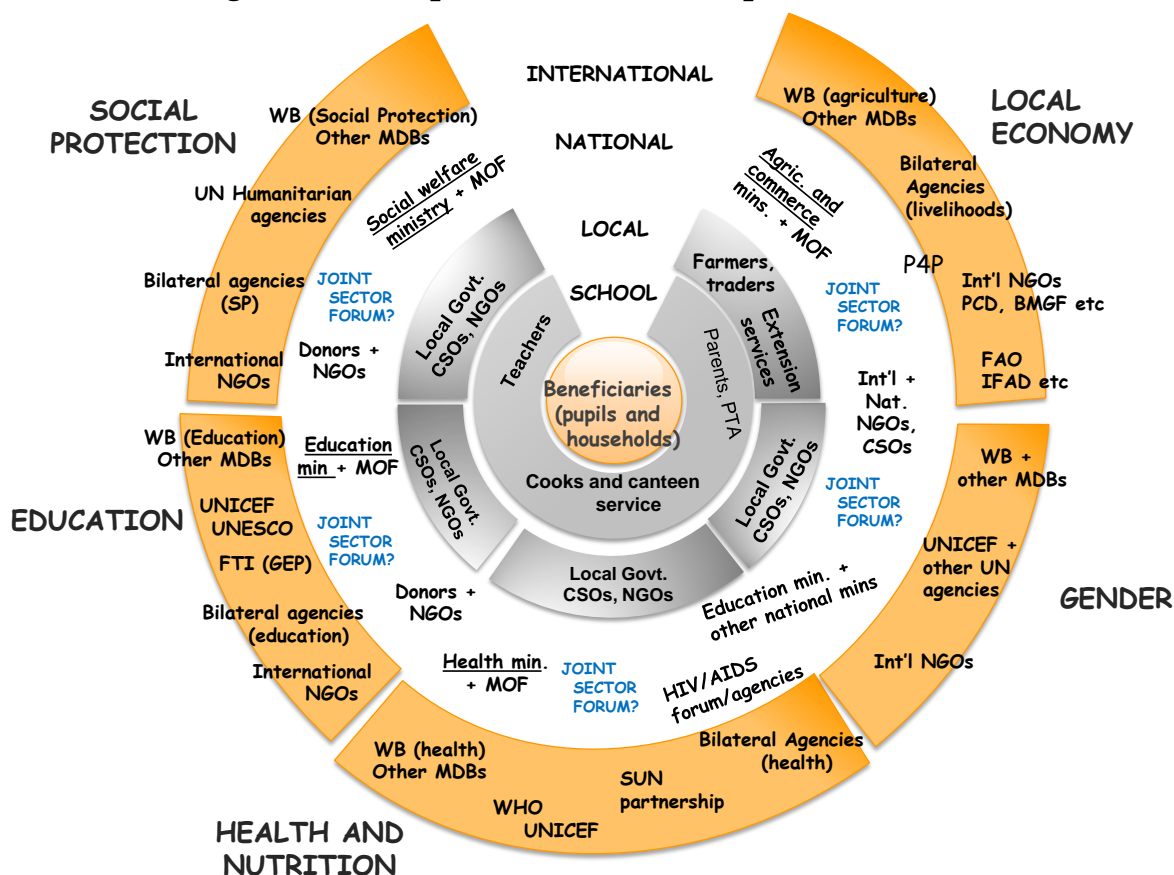
10. The policy proposes social protection as an overarching framework for a number of possible outcomes. These can include a direct safety net function (value transfer), educational benefits (through incentives for enrolment and attendance, and by enhancing the ability to learn) and nutritional benefits (by alleviating short-term hunger and improving children’s nutritional status, particularly when food is fortified and accompanied by deworming); school feeding’s potential to support gender equality; and school feeding as a “platform” for pursuing wider benefits, not the least of which is supporting small-scale agriculture through HGSF. It identifies roles for school feeding as a safety net in emergencies and protracted crises; in post-conflict, post-disaster and transition situations; and in situations of chronic hunger. School feeding is expected to help break the inter-generational cycle of hunger by contributing to learning and school completion.
11. According to WFP’s School Feeding Policy Unit, the policy has three “elements of novelty”: i) framing school feeding as a safety-net intervention with multiple outcomes; ii) working more closely with governments (focusing on the strengthening of sustainable national school feeding systems); and iii) introducing eight standards for quality and sustainability (See Box 1).

Box 1: The eight quality standards for school feeding

1. Sustainability
2. Sound alignment with national policy framework
3. Stable funding and budgeting
4. Needs-based, cost-effective quality programme design
5. Strong institutional frameworks for implementation, monitoring and accountability
6. Strategy for local production and sourcing
7. Strong partnerships and inter-sector coordination
8. Strong community participation and ownership

12. The policy retains the traditional focus on educational objectives and on links to the education sector, but also highlights other outcomes, with social protection as an overarching theme. The effect is to multiply the stakeholders that WFP potentially has to deal with, especially at country office level. The complexity that may result is illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Multiple outcomes, multiple stakeholders



Source: Authors.

Abbreviations in figure: BMGF – Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; CSO – Civil Society Organization; FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN; FTI – Fast Track Initiative; GEP – Global Education Partnership; IFAD – International Fund for Agricultural Development; MDB – Multilateral Development Banks; MOF – Ministry of Finance; NGO – non-governmental organization; P4P – Purchase for Progress; PCD – Partnership for Child Development; PTA – parent-teacher association; SP – Social Protection; SUN – Scaling Up Nutrition; UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; UNICEF – United Nations Children’s Fund; WB – World Bank; WHO – World Health Organization.

MAIN FINDINGS

Perspective

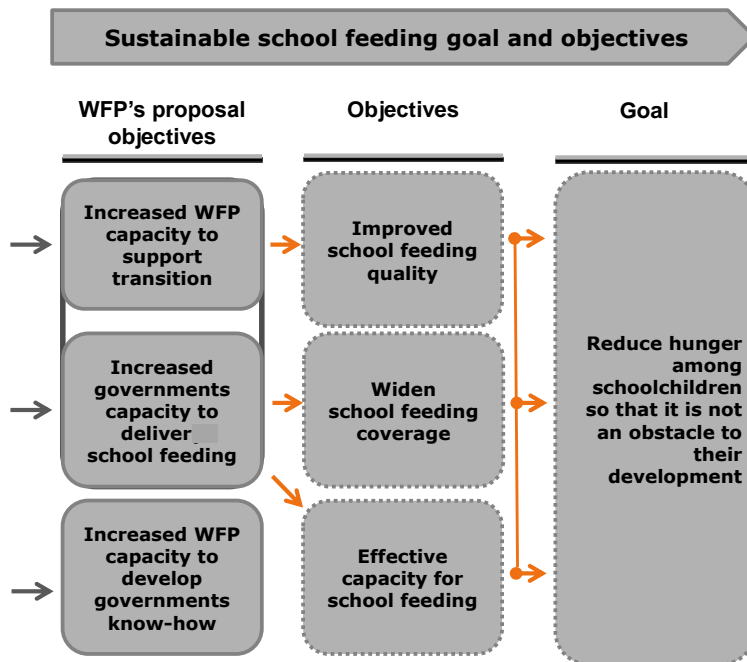
13. The evaluation took place during the roll-out of the policy. This ensures an early opportunity to strengthen policy implementation, but also means that the evaluation is a review of a work-in-progress, not a final assessment. There is a natural tendency to focus on aspects where improvement is possible, but this should not obscure the positive findings.

Quality of the Policy

14. The policy was generally clearly written, and it was grounded in evidence. It was relevant and timely in seeking to codify, and seek consensus around, good practices in school feeding.
15. The policy could have been stronger in three important respects. In the first place, it should have distinguished more carefully between the generic objectives of school feeding and the specific objectives for WFP. It was left to later documents to explain that the

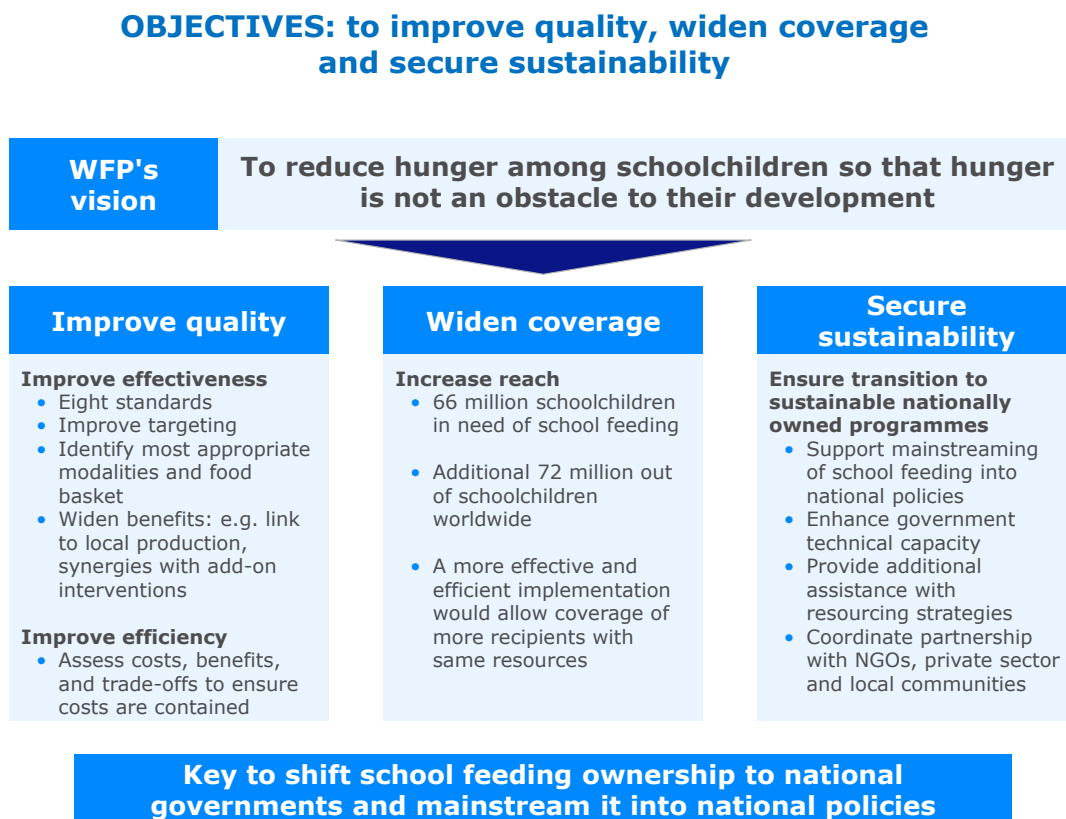
objectives of the policy for WFP were: i) improved school feeding quality; ii) wider school feeding coverage; and iii) effective capacity for school feeding. Both the purpose of the policy document and its corporate implications for WFP would have been clearer if these goals and objectives, as shown in Figure 3, had been spelled out. The update submitted to the Board in June 2011 was a helpful elaboration of the original policy, and paid closer attention to the practicalities of implementation. (Figure 3 below is also recent and illuminating.)

Figure 3: Policy objectives and goal of the school feeding policy



Source: WFP. 2009. Sustainable School Feeding: Lifting Schoolchildren Out of the Hunger Trap (Concept Note). Rome.

Figure 4: WFP school feeding: vision and objectives



Source: March 2011 workshop.

16. Secondly, the policy should also have distinguished more carefully between advocacy and guidance. A tension exists between the advocacy role of the document (persuading the Board and wider stakeholders of the legitimacy of school feeding and of WFP's role in supporting it) and its role as corporate guidance for WFP (how to approach school feeding in practice). Advocacy tends to dominate. Also, there was insufficient recognition that the potential benefits of school feeding are not realized automatically, and that, in practice, there are usually trade-offs between objectives. By exalting all the potential benefits of school feeding, the policy runs the risk of oversimplifying, providing a reference point under which all school feeding objectives can be justified, without emphasizing that most school feeding operations will need to focus on a subset of the possible objectives.
17. Thirdly, it would have been helpful if more attention had been given to the “elements of novelty” that were later highlighted.
18. Moreover, using a social protection framework is demanding. The school feeding policy focuses mainly on the value transfer aspect of school feeding, and does not adequately bring out the promotive aspects (see Figure 1 above). It does not follow through the concept of social protection as an overarching system, within which school feeding would be just one of many possible interventions. The presentation is very WFP-centric – school feeding is described as the platform for other interventions – and the radical implications for WFP of a social protection approach are not brought out. The recent evaluation of WFP's role in social protection and safety nets,³ by contrast, argues that shifting towards social protection requires fundamental changes for WFP at all levels: in how it operates, in

³ *WFP's Role in Social Protection and Safety Nets: A Strategic Evaluation*. The summary report of the evaluation is available as WFP.EB.A/2011/7-B and the management response as WFP/EB.A/2011/7-B/Add.1.

the objectives of its programmes, and in how it works with others. It warns that simply relabelling projects and programmes as social protection will harm WFP's credibility.

19. The policy is strongly evidence-based, and the evidence-gathering that preceded it was very impressive. However, the policy tends to cite positive findings about the potential benefits of school feeding without adequately stressing the other factors on which those benefits also depend.
20. Recent evidence broadly corroborates that which was available when the policy was prepared. Thus:
 - a) On educational benefits: there is no doubt that school feeding can act as an incentive for enrolment and attendance. It can be targeted effectively to girls through on-site feeding and take-home rations (THR). However, the fact that such effects have often been demonstrated does not mean that they are inevitable (this is a key finding from recent impact evaluations). Effects further along the causal chain are more controversial. Attendance may be necessary for learning to take place, but it is never sufficient. Learning depends on the presence and quality of teachers, together with other aspects of the learning environment, and there may be little return on investment if children drop out early. School feeding may have undesirable or paradoxical effects on the education system as a whole. For example, it may exacerbate overcrowding and strain inadequate facilities. It has been empirically demonstrated that short-term hunger can impair concentration and cognitive performance, but impact evaluations have found it much more difficult to demonstrate a corresponding performance improvement attributable to school feeding. (This is not wholly surprising, in view of the complementary factors that contribute to learning.)
 - b) On nutritional benefits: the policy acknowledged the importance of the "first thousand days", which are not directly covered by school feeding. The policy highlighted the potential importance of school feeding programmes not only in alleviating child hunger in school, but also in enhancing the nutritional status of children particularly when the food is fortified with micronutrients, and referred to the potential cognitive – and hence educational – benefits that may derive from this. There is indeed strong evidence that school feeding can bring such benefits: a large number of studies agree on the direction of effects, but their scale is less clear. At the same time, recent evidence in two areas has tended to strengthen the nutritional relevance of school feeding. The first relates to the spillover effect (the benefits of school feeding that extend to other members of the household), and the second to evidence about the potential positive influence of school feeding on adolescent girls from a life-cycle perspective. The policy does not mention the latter case, though the Strategic Plan does.
 - c) Framing school feeding as a social protection measure does not introduce new benefits; it is more a matter of looking at the same effects in a different way. For example, it highlights the significance of the value transfer that provides the incentive for increased enrolment or for a lower drop-out rate in times of stress. The policy drew attention to two very important pieces of "pragmatic" evidence: i) as countries develop, they tend to maintain school feeding systems; and ii) school feeding can often be scaled up rapidly (a major lesson of the 2008 crisis). These factors suggest that school feeding should indeed be taken into account when considering the range of available social protection measures. On the other hand, the policy tends to understate the difficulties in the way of school feeding being seen as the optimal intervention. School feeding may be at a disadvantage because of its high administrative costs and its limited targeting. Its strengths may include an ability to scale up and the low

opportunity cost if resources are provided as food aid (though WFP is rightly seeking to make resources more fungible).

- d) As regards HGSF, the dimension of the local economic benefits derived from it is the hardest to bring within the “social protection” framework, though it can be reconciled with WFP’s broader mandate. It is certainly true that food procurement can be a stimulus to local agriculture, and there are conspicuous examples (including the United States of America and Brazil) where this has contributed to the development of established national school feeding systems. These collateral benefits can attract political support, which reinforces the sustainability of school feeding. The policy, however, tends to oversimplify the mechanisms through which school feeding may be able to contribute to local economic development, and is silent on the relationship between HGSF and P4P.
21. The policy presented the “investment case” for school feeding as a demonstration of its high economic returns. This was misleading, because it presented a hypothetical model as if it were an empirical finding. There is indeed evidence for each of the links in the chain of causality on which the model is based, but the overwhelming weight of evidence is that most of the links in the causality chain are fragile; for a low-income country to achieve the results portrayed by the model would require a perfect combination of complementary inputs. Recent studies, including the Office of Evaluation (OE) evaluations of the impact of school feeding in Cambodia, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia and Kenya, show that the interlinked benefits of school feeding cannot be taken for granted, and that the benefits vary according to the modality used (in-school meals, THR, etc). Thus:
- There is one overriding conclusion that has been carefully examined and analysed. It is that the beneficial impacts attributable to school feeding are limited if one attempts to extract school feeding from the larger context of how learning, health, and livelihood outcomes are achieved. School feeding without the appropriate learning environment and family/community support is a weak intervention and its impacts are mostly restricted to food security outcomes.⁴
22. Most seriously, evidence about the costs and the cost-effectiveness, of school feeding is conspicuously weak. Given that costs are at the heart of making choices, the policy could have been more emphatic about the importance of addressing cost issues and of using cost-effectiveness as a criterion not only in the design of school feeding interventions but also in choosing between school feeding and other means of achieving specific outcomes.
23. The policy was coherent with WFP’s Strategic Plan and other key policies. It included an innovative and commendable effort to propagate general standards for school feeding systems (see Box 1 above). The policy was also generally consistent with international standards for nutrition, education and aid effectiveness.
24. By 2008, widely accepted criteria for good social protection systems were available (and, indeed, had been used in *Rethinking School Feeding*). It was unfortunate that the framers of the policy did not measure school feeding against these criteria, which highlight both the strengths and the weaknesses of school feeding and should affect its role in a social protection system. By international standards, the social protection dimension of the policy was therefore embryonic.

⁴ *Impact Evaluation of WFP School Feeding Programmes in Kenya (1999–2008): A Mixed-Methods Approach*. The summary report of the evaluation is available as WFP/EB.A/2010/7-D.

25. In general, practicability (“the extent to which a policy is workable and can be achieved”) is an area of relative weakness in the policy. Given the complexity of the policy and the extent of the changes it envisaged in WFP’s approach and behaviour, the policy would have been stronger as a practical document if it had: i) acknowledged more fully the scale of the challenges that adopting these new directions would imply and recognized the need to prioritize objectives in specific cases; ii) discussed more systematically and realistically the scope of WFP’s responsibility for school feeding outcomes; and iii) clearly set out WFP-specific objectives and outlined the main activities required for their attainment.

Results of the Policy

26. It is a complicated undertaking to attribute results to the policy, and too soon to expect outcomes and impacts from operations commenced only after the policy was adopted. At the same time, the policy envisages the continuation of many long-standing approaches and of some innovations that predate its adoption. A relevant consideration, then, is whether subsequent practices are in line with the policy and whether they are the direct result of it. At this stage, it is also relevant to consider whether the policy is on course to achieve its envisaged results. Most judgements are qualitative because it is early for data trends to emerge and because the effects of the policy on WFP’s portfolio are ambiguous. For example, increasing school feeding but decreasing the amount undertaken by WFP might be in line with the policy.
27. The endorsement of the policy allowed the policy and programme units to turn their energies to supporting its implementation. The Concept Note (2009), the Implementation Approach (2010) and the Implementation Update (2011) provided successively more detailed implementation plans and, in some respects, also elaborated the policy itself. These documents have given the policy a more practical orientation and have been complemented by an impressive amount of work to produce guidelines and tools for its implementation.
28. WFP has a good reputation with stakeholders generally, who tend to approve its recent strategic shifts. The evaluation nonetheless found that, beyond direct partners and Board members, awareness of the policy itself was patchy. Although external stakeholders are aware of WFP’s reorientation towards food assistance, many sector and thematic specialists in aid agencies remain rather sceptical of some of the policy’s principal claims relating to, for example, the competitiveness of school feeding as a social protection intervention, and of its place in a nutrition strategy. Some are also wary of what they see as WFP “mission creep” and self-promotion.
29. Within WFP, there is no doubt that Headquarters staff in both the policy and programme units are highly committed to the implementation of the policy, and that it provides their main agenda. At country level, with some exceptions, there is much less familiarity with the policy as such. However, the policy endorses many good practices and initiatives that country offices are already following and embodies principles, such as government ownership, that are already familiar elements of WFP’s overall strategy. Thus country offices are often implementing important elements of the policy without acknowledging it as a guide. But this falls short of a conscious commitment to implementation, and neglects important elements such as the eight quality standards, which are not being used systematically to monitor and report on school feeding programmes.
30. The evaluation found that WFP’s valuable relationships with core school feeding partners (notably the World Bank and PCD) have been reinforced. Less attention was accorded to traditional United Nations partners during the policy development and roll-out.

Relationships with two emerging donors, Brazil and the Russian Federation, have clearly been strengthened by the policy.

31. The School Feeding Policy Implementation Approach stated that “WFP programmes, work plans and the Country Strategies will reflect the WFP school feeding policy and implementation approach”.⁵ The evaluation found that this is beginning to happen, but that there is room for improvement. For example, the school feeding policy is reflected to some degree in the majority of Country Strategies, but even where the alignment between these strategies and the policy is greatest, only limited analysis is made of the prospects for sustainable national school feeding systems. Among ten operations recently approved for countries that were not case-study countries, some evidence emerged of movement in the directions advocated by the policy (at least according to the descriptions of the operations). Recent operations have laid greater emphasis on supporting capacity development to favour government management of school feeding systems. Similarly, more references are being made to the importance of results-oriented monitoring and evaluation. Generally, however, the principal justification for school feeding refers to its educational outcomes, and the safety net/social protection dimensions are not strongly expressed. The main change in the nutritional aspects of the school feeding design is the increased prominence of micronutrients.
32. Many innovations that are in line with the policy also preceded it. They include working with governments to support the development of national school feeding systems, assisting in managing such systems, consciously using THR for social objectives that extend beyond education, the wider use of micronutrients, and drives, usually government-led, to obtain synergies between school feeding and agricultural development. There is also evidence of good receptiveness to some themes of the policy, notably the promotion of HGSP – although, in practice, HGSP issues are more complex than the policy suggests, and WFP’s efforts have focused more on the flagship P4P pilot, which the policy does not mention. Stakeholder workshops in both Mozambique and the Dominican Republic – countries at very different stages in the development of national school feeding systems – have found the policy’s quality standards helpful. These standards have been used by some country offices, most frequently as a communication tool, but have not been used as a basis for systematic monitoring and reporting. Surprisingly, the evaluation found that the energy content of rations in four of the five full case study countries was below WFP’s own recommended standards.
33. The sustainability of national school feeding systems is highly dependent on how deeply embedded and affordable they are for the country concerned. Among the case studies, the systems in Bhutan, the Dominican Republic and Honduras seem highly durable. Their survival is not in doubt, but there are issues concerning their quality in various dimensions, including social protection. The three African cases (Malawi, Mali and Mozambique) all aspire to develop sustainable school feeding systems. Mali is the furthest advanced, drawing on many years of WFP support for system development; Mozambique is at the earliest stage (and therefore very receptive to guidance); and Malawi’s early plans are very ambitious. In all three cases, the systems must be regarded as fragile. Afghanistan and Tajikistan, for different reasons, do not see hand-over/transition as practical in the near term.
34. WFP’s ability to sustain its support for the policy will depend on its following through with a radical reorientation of its approaches, as the policy requires.

⁵ WFP. 2010. Note to the Executive Policy Council: School Feeding Policy Implementation Approach, EPC11/2010/D.

Reasons for Results

35. A number of external trends have facilitated the implementation of the policy. The changing patterns in food assistance have made it more practical to espouse a more flexible policy that is not driven by the availability of food aid. As the policy correctly analysed, countries that achieve higher levels of income are likely to include school meals among the services they provide. The discourse on aid effectiveness continues to stress the importance of country ownership and the use of country systems. Linking school feeding to support for domestic agriculture repeatedly proves politically popular, even if not technically straightforward. In many ways, therefore, the policy is well positioned, although the competition for funding – whether external or domestic – is usually intense, with greater financial constraints in the poorer countries.
36. At the same time, the evaluation found a number of factors that have tended to hold back the implementation of the policy. For instance, WFP encounters some external suspicion of its motives when it advocates school feeding. During the preparation of the policy, no consultation was held with WFP's field operatives, and internal dissemination was weak. There was ambiguity between rolling out the policy across WFP and focusing on pilot countries chosen as having high potential for enacting the policy. The paradoxical result was that some non-pilot country offices that were well advanced in pursuing key elements of the policy felt support was lacking, whereas some of the pilots found that, in the light of the progress they had already made, much of the guidance material was redundant. Human resources for implementing the policy were severely constrained. Not only was the availability of professional staff at Headquarters limited, but the broad scope of the policy also made considerable demands of already scarce country office staff (see Figure 2 above).
37. Above all, the full implementation of the policy depends on major changes in WFP systems, incentives and procedures. Most of the necessary changes are identified in the Strategic Plan, but their implementation is slow.

CONCLUSION

Overall Assessment

38. The 2009 policy had important strengths. It was timely, clear and persuasively written. It was well aligned with WFP's Strategic Plan and other key policies, and with principles of aid-effectiveness. It drew on an insightful stock-taking of accumulated evidence: insights included the holistic view of the effects of school feeding, including social protection, the need to work towards sustainable government-run school feeding systems, and the possibilities for linking school feeding to agricultural development. Its proposal to set quality standards for school feeding was an important innovation.
39. But the policy also had significant weaknesses. It did not distinguish clearly enough between the general case for school feeding and the specific role(s) that WFP should play in school feeding. Its treatment of social protection was too narrow (re-labelling school feeding is not enough). While it drew on solid evidence, it tended to overstate the case and allowed advocacy to undermine balanced guidance, which erodes WFP's credibility. The policy should have been more emphatic about the need to focus on a subset of objectives in a specific operation, and should have given greater emphasis to the importance of cost-effectiveness as a criterion not only in the design of school feeding interventions but also in choosing between school feeding and other means towards achieving specific outcomes. Including a high-level implementation plan in the policy document would have

substantially enhanced its practicability, along with the quality of Board discussions. International thinking has been evolving quite rapidly in several of the fields that the policy links to school feeding, and making sure that the policy stays relevant and up to date therefore poses a challenge.

What have been the Results of the Policy?

40. Attributing results to the policy is difficult, partly because its adoption is recent, but also because the policy endorsed many elements of existing practice, and many of its recommendations for “new” approaches were already being tried in some countries. The evaluation took note of the progress made to date in implementing the policy and looked at whether the policy is on course to achieve its intended results.
41. The policy is already reflected in WFP’s portfolio and activities in several positive ways, but there is room for further progress. Aggregate data on WFP’s own school feeding activities do not yield much information because it is too soon for post-policy trends to appear, and the effects of the policy are also potentially ambiguous. Most Country Strategy documents reflect some themes of the policy, but little analysis is made of the scope for national school feeding systems. Recently approved WFP school feeding operations do give more weight to capacity development but, in terms of their organization and coordination and dialogue processes, most are firmly rooted in the education sector. The safety net/social protection dimensions of the policy do not yet come through clearly.
42. On the other hand, there are plenty of examples of WFP already working in the ways the policy envisages, for example by supporting an emerging national school feeding system. There are also cases at different stages of school feeding system development where governments seem very receptive to WFP support for capacity development and to HGSF. Although social protection/safety net concepts are increasingly being used within WFP, it can be difficult to have school feeding included as part of the social protection dialogue at a country level, especially where the leading players have already shaped the terms of the debate using other models. The quality standards advocated by the policy have so far been used to a limited extent only, and not all the school feeding programmes in the case-study countries comply fully with WFP’s own nutritional guidance.
43. Overall, the evaluation found that experience to date tends to confirm the relevance of the policy. Some progress has been made to align WFP activities with the agenda set forth by the policy, but much remains to be done.

Why has the Policy Produced the Results Observed?

44. The evaluation noted many positives in the implementation of the policy, including the energy that has gone into its roll-out and the development within WFP of supporting guidelines and tools. Inevitably, reporting so soon after the policy was launched will focus on why the policy has not made more difference yet, and will ask what can be done to further the attainment of results in the future.
45. The evaluation notes that the policy's implications are radical, and that radical change usually takes time. More specifically, implementation has been constrained by:
 - i) limitations in the policy itself;
 - ii) limited internal consultation with personnel in the field – better consultation would have given the policy a more practical orientation, as well as a head start in dissemination and ownership;

- iii) the focus on pilot countries, which resulted in some advanced country offices unsupported, while some of the pilot countries felt they had already moved beyond the materials being offered by Headquarters; and
- iv) the radical change of organizational approach and culture that is embodied not just in the school feeding policy but in the overall strategic transformation of WFP that it supports. Implementation depends not only on the technical advice of the school feeding and programme units at Headquarters – and the complexity and breadth of the policy makes providing such advice very demanding – but also on organization-wide financing arrangements and incentive structures that are still being put in place.

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

46. The evaluation's recommendations are consistent with the spirit and intent of the existing policy. They are designed to reinforce the implementation work that has already been done and, in many cases, to build on efforts already under way. They are mutually reinforcing and presented in a logical rather than a chronological order.
47. **Recommendation 1: Clarify and update the policy.** As this report has shown, the debates around school feeding are evolving quite rapidly, and it is therefore necessary to refresh the policy at regular intervals. This will afford an opportunity to deal with some of the weaknesses and oversights of the original policy. WFP should therefore prepare an update of the school feeding policy and seek Board approval for it (probably in June 2013). The update would amend rather than replace the existing policy.⁶ The exercise should be led by the school feeding policy and programme units, which should involve other Headquarters divisions and engage with regional and country-level staff, so as to maximize ownership and ensure it is oriented towards the practical implementation challenges.
48. The update should:
- i) **bridge the gap between the policy and the implementation strategy.** In particular, the update should spell out more clearly WFP roles and the changes in WFP activity and portfolio that will result from the policy. It should be more explicit about the comparative advantages of WFP and specify the limits of WFP's responsibilities.⁷ It should also set out a clear monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategy (see also Recommendations 2 and 4).
 - ii) **update the treatment of key themes,** facilitating practical context-specific choices and addressing the gaps identified in this evaluation (see Box 2).

⁶ The 2009 update of the policy on capacity development took a similar approach.

⁷ The concept of comparative advantage implies identifying also those areas for which others are better suited to take responsibility.

Box 2: Themes to be addressed in the policy update

Social protection. Reflect the new WFP policy on social protection (expected mid-2012), ensuring that the vocabulary and approaches are up-to-date and realistic.

Education. Highlight the extent to which the full realization of the potential educational benefits of school feeding depends on other elements of national education systems, which WFP and other donors should seek to support.

Nutrition. Take account of WFP's new policy on nutrition (expected early 2012), while recognizing that governments may have to strike a balance between coverage and a "gold standard" of nutritional quality.

HGSF. Address the relationship between HGSF and P4P. It will need to take better cognizance of the complexities arising from possible divergences in objectives and differing approaches to local procurement, and be more realistic about WFP's ambitions for local economic development.

The WFP workshop that reviewed the draft of this report also suggested that the update could: i) give more thorough consideration to the full continuum, from pre-primary to adolescence; and ii) address school feeding in emergencies and in protracted refugee/internally displaced person (IDP) contexts, bearing in mind that WFP does not have a comparable policy on emergency school feeding.

49. **Recommendation 2: Operationalize the policy more effectively.** Better operationalization requires:

- a) **strengthening staff skills and implementation support at field level.** Ensure adequate technical support for all country offices⁸ and continue work on identifying and developing the new skills required for WFP's new school feeding approaches. Wherever possible, link training and staff development to wider initiatives across WFP in order to avoid focusing too narrowly on specific instruments such as school feeding.
- b) **further development of guidance material.** This should focus on the rationalization of materials (taking account of user feedback), more guidance on prioritization and trade-offs in school feeding design, better links to WFP processes,⁹ and objective benchmarking that can be used to track progress in national school feeding systems.
- c) **more attention to costs and cost-effectiveness.** Build on the very valuable analysis performed and data collected during the cost-benchmarking exercise and by better monitoring WFP's own costs. At a minimum, all strategy, programme and monitoring documents should be required to report on planned and effective unit costs.
- d) **strengthening relationships with external partners.** Existing core partnerships could be further strengthened (e.g. by reciprocal secondment of personnel), while also making sure traditional partnerships with other United Nations agencies are not neglected.

50. **Recommendation 3: Strengthen the financing of the policy.** Financial resources and financial and budgetary incentives are key to the operationalization of the policy. The following steps are recommended:

⁸ This has budget implications – see Recommendation 4.

⁹ As one example, the guidance for the preparation of country strategies, which is currently framed at a very high level and generic level, should be more explicit about the material on national progress towards development of sustainable school feeding strategies that will be required.

- a) **Cost and ensure additional financing for the budgetary implications of Recommendation 2(a) – such as country office staff training and specialist support** – as part of an overall policy implementation plan, to enable the School Feeding Service, the Programme Design Service and the regional bureaux to support all country offices more effectively in policy implementation.
 - b) **Roll out WFP’s new financial framework as rapidly as possible.**
 - c) **Seek more predictable funding.** Developmental and capacity development work require a strategic perspective that is undermined by very short-term financing. This implies, first, securing multi-year funding for WFP’s own professional staff working to support the school feeding policy. The Board should (continue to) press for more unrestricted and multi-year funding to support WFP’s core analytical and policy development work. The prevalence of short-term and earmarked funding perpetuates fragmentation and makes it harder to ensure thematic coordination across WFP. Second, to promote a strategic perspective that contributes to the development and financing of national school feeding strategies, country strategies should flag long-term financing requirements (focused pre-eminently on overall national school feeding requirements, and only secondarily on funding requirements for possible WFP operations).
 - d) **Strengthen WFP’s ability to analyse school feeding’s budgetary implications for governments.** Those considering the nexus of school feeding, education and social protection need to understand the political economy of the budget processes involved. In particular, what funds does school feeding compete with in practice, and at which levels of government?¹⁰
51. **Recommendation 4: Intensify and expand learning and further develop the policy.** For near-term strengthening of monitoring, evaluation and learning within WFP:
- a) include an explicit M&E strategy in the policy update;
 - b) document experiences and lessons from the pilot countries; and
 - c) draw on the impact evaluation approach that OE has developed as part of its guidance for project formulation and subsequent M&E:
 - ◇ At project formulation, spell out the anticipated paths to impact and distinguish which factors are under the control of WFP (or a national school feeding agency) from those that are not. This approach will help ensure a more frugal initial design that focuses on a subset of school feeding objectives, and designs interventions accordingly.
 - ◇ Strengthen regular M&E with a better general understanding of the relevance and quality of different types of evidence.
52. **Support applied research relevant to the design and management of school feeding operations.**¹¹ This is a long-term strategy – rigorous research takes time – and is vital to credibility (see Box 3).

¹⁰ *Rethinking School Feeding* rightly highlighted this as an issue that requires more attention, both in research and in practice.

¹¹ The workshop on the draft evaluation report suggested a number of fields for applied research, including: i) conditions for feasible hand-over; ii) nutrition (or broader) benefits of school feeding, in particular to adolescent girls and pre-primary children; iii) school feeding in emergency and protracted situations (could include IDPs/refugees); iv) issues surrounding cost-effectiveness of school feeding; v) different school feeding modalities or cash transfers.

Box 3: Ensuring the value and credibility of research

The credibility of research is crucial, especially because WFP is not regarded as a disinterested party. Wherever possible, such research should be undertaken independently and/or in partnership with organizations that are regarded as sufficiently credible and disinterested. When reporting on such research and on its own studies, WFP should be more careful to distinguish between analytical work and advocacy. Analytical work should be careful to maintain balance and not to draw stronger conclusions than the evidence justifies. The credibility and quality of WFP's internal work could be enhanced by systematic peer review, drawing on expertise external to WFP. It would be useful to develop clear protocols for the review and publication of research findings.

In order to ensure robust findings, research could be linked to deliberate experiments – for example in controlled trials of school feeding modalities or approaches to targeting. More direct comparisons between school feeding and alternative interventions – such as conditional cash transfers – should be encouraged.¹² Much can be learned from such experiments, although care is needed in interpreting the findings¹³ and in determining the extent to which they can be generalized to other contexts.

WFP should be willing to test core assumptions through such research; an example is the assumption that within-school targeting of school meals is generally infeasible.

53. To **promote international learning**, WFP and its partners – particularly the Brazil Centre of Excellence – should consider setting up a database on school feeding programmes that describes the coverage and functioning of programmes globally¹⁴ and the possibility of linking it to an annual independent report on developments and trends in school feeding.¹⁵ What happens in the aggregate of WFP school feeding operations is less important than what is happening globally: that hungry children are fed is more important than who feeds them.

¹² For planned research in Cambodia, see WFP. 2011. Evaluation of Cash vs. Take-Home Rations in Food-for-Education Programmes (Concept Note). Rome.

¹³ Not least because school feeding interventions may have a more complex set of benefits than the comparator.

¹⁴ As mentioned in *Rethinking School Feeding*.

¹⁵ This, in turn, could contribute to establishing objective benchmarks for school feeding systems – see Recommendation 2 on guidance materials.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

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|------|-----------------------------------|
| HGSF | Home-Grown School Feeding |
| IDP | internally displaced person |
| M&E | monitoring and evaluation |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| OE | office of evaluation |
| P4P | Purchase for Progress |
| PCD | Partnership for Child Development |
| THR | take-home rations |