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SUMMARY REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC EVALUATION OF WFP'S CONTINGENCY PLANNING (2002–2008)

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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.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Contingency planning as a specialized emergency preparedness activity was introduced by WFP to enhance its humanitarian response. The purpose of this evaluation is to reflect on the contributions and limitations of this initiative in the spirit of learning and improving practice.

While contingency planning has been implemented at least once in virtually every WFP country office, the evaluation found that contingency planning as implemented so far has had relatively limited impact on preparedness and response in many cases, particularly with regard to concrete preparedness enhancements such as pre-positioning of stocks, logistical arrangements, improved access to sources of information and pre-approved agreements with partners or authorities. Notable examples exist where contingency planning did make a substantive contribution but that contribution has not been consistent overall and the few practical outcomes observed were realized primarily when planning for well-defined, imminent threats.

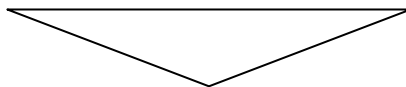
Where there was broad participation in the process, contingency planning resulted in greater awareness of risk, anticipation of problems and improved understanding, but this was not always the case. With regard to inter-agency contingency planning, WFP contributed substantively to efforts at the global level within the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Contingency planning as cluster lead is a new opportunity to which WFP has begun to dedicate efforts. At regional and country levels, while participation in inter-agency contingency planning has remained consistent, overall, WFP leadership and active engagement has weakened over the past few years.

Reasons for why contingency planning as currently practised has had less than optimal results derive principally from how it has been implemented, particularly the focus on producing detailed plans as its sole objective. Other factors include the practice of involving only limited staff or partners, variable support at both the technical and the managerial levels, weak linkages to other planning processes and diminishing financial support.

Although the impact is found to be less than optimal, the evaluation found that investment in contingency planning has almost certainly been worthwhile, and potential benefits could be multiplied with higher levels of investment in preparedness, including contingency planning.

The recommendations offered encourage the re-conceptualization of contingency planning, renewed organizational commitment to preparedness, including contingency planning, and the updating of guidance materials and further enhancement of staff skills, building on field experience and innovations.

DRAFT DECISION*



The Board takes note of “Summary Report of the Strategic Evaluation of WFP’s Contingency Planning (2002–2008)” (WFP/EB.2/2009/6-A) and the management response in WFP/EB.2/2009/6-A/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.



BACKGROUND

Evaluation Features

1. The objective of this evaluation is to identify the achievements and shortfalls of WFP's work in contingency planning as a strategic and operational process firmly rooted within the broader WFP emergency preparedness and response framework, and to learn from these how to improve performance and outcomes. The evaluation focuses on: i) assessing the extent to which contingency planning has improved emergency preparedness and contributed to making humanitarian action more appropriate, timely, efficient, effective and of higher quality; ii) the organizational framework; iii) normative guidance; and iv) WFP's contribution to humanitarian contingency planning through inter-agency processes. The evaluation covers the period 2002–2008 and was carried out between March and July 2009.
2. The evaluation team consisted of five independent consultants. The evaluation involved desk reviews of documents, including literature, contingency planning inventory, evaluations, normative guidance and WFP contingency plans; interviews with stakeholders at WFP Headquarters, in the field and in partner organizations; field visits to eight country offices – Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), El Salvador, Guinea, Nicaragua, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Peru and Somalia – and four regional bureaux; and a web-based survey of country office teams. Draft reports were shared with stakeholders for comments, which were taken into account when they called for factual corrections or clarifications.

Context

3. Early calls for United Nations entities to improve emergency response through various forms of planning and preparedness came in the early 1960s and were reiterated a decade later in the wake of a number of major emergencies. With each new emergency, performance gaps were identified and increasingly more robust preparedness and response mechanisms called for: special financial arrangements, stockpiling, emergency planning, manuals and guidelines, and so forth. The trend within the international systems suggests a continuing evolution from ad hoc humanitarian actions to more structured systems of support to emergency response, with increasing focus on preparedness at the country office level.
4. Various WFP partner agencies have maintained efforts to sustain and improve their preparedness, including contingency planning. Contingency planning was first introduced as a planning tool by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the early 1980s, and has been supported since by specialized planning staff working from its headquarters. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) began to give specific attention to preparedness and contingency planning in the mid-1990s, using as its main planning tool an emergency preparedness and response planning framework, with related processes supported through a decentralized global programme to institutionalize preparedness and response planning in all offices.
5. Larger non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also grappled with preparedness and contingency planning over many years. The planning process of the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), called "emergency preparedness planning", includes a contingency planning element to be implemented in the face of an unfolding



emergency; in 1995, CARE institutionalized a global policy that made emergency operations plans mandatory for all CARE country offices. Oxfam uses the term “contingency planning”, and understands it as a planning function for all country offices, which includes a process to be updated regularly with a review of risks and an assessment of preparedness. Common challenges have been faced by all agencies: difficulty in keeping planning and plans current and relevant, the overproduction of heavy detailed documents (plans) that prove of little use, and offices’ tendency to complete a plan as a bureaucratic obligation rather than a planning function.

6. In 2001, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Sub-working Group on Early Warning and Contingency Planning was initiated, chaired jointly by WFP and UNICEF with active participation of agencies concerned with preparedness and contingency planning. It functions as the principal international forum for IASC operational agencies on related issues. Notable contributions have included collective development of new early warning tools, support of inter-agency contingency planning in specific emergencies, and development of inter-agency contingency planning guidelines. At the regional level, to some extent mirroring the inter-agency forum at the global level, inter-agency working groups have been constituted to enhance collaboration on preparedness and contingency planning, often supported by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). At the country level, collaboration on preparedness and contingency planning typically occurs under the rubric of the United Nations/humanitarian country team.
7. Best practices drawn from reviews of the experiences of contingency planners¹ suggest that contingency planning is effective when:
 - it is recognized as being a management rather than a technical function and is led by, and has the strong commitment of, senior decision-makers;
 - it is a participatory process that includes all those who will be required to work together in the event of an emergency, including finance, administration, human resources and information and communications technology (ICT) staff as well as programme and other operational staff, and it deliberately seeks to enhance coordination among units and organizations;
 - it starts with an assessment of humanitarian needs but also assesses response capacity, to identify and find ways of overcoming gaps;
 - it is linked with national systems, whenever possible, and takes account of existing community-based disaster management practices, the current status of preparedness measures and systems and government plans;
 - it is an ongoing process that includes regular reviews and updating;
 - it is integrated into ongoing planning processes;

¹ These documents include:

- IASC. 2007. Challenges and Suggestions for Enhancing Inter-Agency Contingency Planning – Report of the 1st Global Consultation of Contingency Planners in Humanitarian Agencies. Geneva, IASC Sub-Working Group on Preparedness and Contingency Planning. July;
- Choularton, R. 2007. Conclusions and Challenges for the Future. *In* Contingency Planning and Humanitarian Action: A Review of Practice. Network Paper Issue 59. London, Humanitarian Practice Network, March;
- IASC. 2007. Inter-Agency Contingency Planning Guidelines for Humanitarian Assistance. Geneva, IASC Sub-Working Group on Preparedness and Contingency Planning, November.



- it is linked with early warning and other information and decision-making systems;
- it is facilitated, but not carried out, by someone who has both good contingency planning experience and facilitation skills;²
- actual planning is undertaken by country office staff; the final plan is concise and easy to use; and separate elements can be used by different users – senior decision-makers, sector specialists and donors;
- plans include only the detail required to inform the needed preparedness actions, assure response capacities and resolve anticipated problems, avoiding “over-planning” or the “consolidation trap”; and
- triggers are identified to determine when to take specific preparedness or response actions.

Academic research³ emphasizes that emergency planning will be more effective if:

- it is based on a problem-solving model;
- it is directed towards mechanisms and techniques that promote inter-organizational coordination and common decision-making, rather than detailed definitions of what should be done in every contingency; and
- the planning process is emphasized over production of a plan.

Overview of Contingency Planning in WFP

8. Around 2000 WFP came to appreciate the need to review its emergency systems and mechanisms in light of the challenging situations it had confronted when responding to multiple and concurrent emergencies in the late 1990s. Concerted attention to contingency planning was part of a new approach that aimed to provoke a cultural change in WFP, from being responsive to being more forward-looking and anticipatory. In addition to contingency planning, complementary concepts, initiatives and systems were introduced, including corporate early warning, EPWeb, emergency response training, and establishment of a situation room.
9. WFP defines contingency planning as: “The process of establishing programme objectives, approaches and procedures to respond to specific situations or events that are likely to occur, including identifying those events and developing likely scenarios and appropriate plans to prepare and respond to them in an effective manner”. As such, it is designed to plan responses for specific contingency situations. It is a process that is intended to address both strategic and operational issues, and the planning is normally expected to result in a specific, actionable plan.
10. Within the broader preparedness initiative, the evolution of contingency planning in WFP since 2000 was marked by a concerted push to develop and mainstream the practice, facilitated by strong donor support, especially the Department for International Development (DFID) Institutional Strategy Paper (ISP) grants. The first intensive

² Technical support for inter-agency contingency planning should be multi-agency, not from a single agency or body.

³ Dynes, Russell R. 1994. Community Emergency Planning: False Assumptions and Inappropriate Analogies, *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 12(2): 141–58; Quarantelli, E.L. 1998. Major Criteria for Judging Disaster Planning and Managing their Applicability in Developing Societies. Preliminary Paper No. 268. Newark, DE, Disaster Research Center, University of Delaware.



contingency planning training series started in 2001. WFP issued contingency planning guidelines in 2002, subsequently supported by an associated tool kit. A WFP emergency preparedness and response framework was developed in 2001–2002 and refined in 2003. Extensive training in contingency planning was conducted between 2003 and 2006, with more than 400 people trained. IASC guidelines on contingency planning were produced in 2002 and updated in 2007, with WFP playing a leading role.

11. Contingency planning has remained a primary indicator of the state of preparedness at the country office level. Contingency planning has been supported by the regional bureaux, with global guidance and support from Headquarters staff. Between 2002 and 2008, contingency planning efforts covered a range of different emergency types – roughly 60 percent for human-made crises and 40 percent for natural disasters – and included planning for both new emergencies and potential changes in ongoing protracted emergencies.
12. During the same period, more than 125 WFP contingency plans were recorded⁴ and WFP also participated in more than 84 inter-agency contingency planning exercises. However, charting contingency planning by year revealed that although the number of contingency plans prepared by WFP offices more than doubled from 2002 to 2005, it then declined, with the same number of contingency plans recorded for 2008 as for 2002. This coincided with a decrease in the funds for supporting preparedness activities.

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

13. To assess the contribution of contingency planning to preparedness and response in WFP, the evaluation examined how contingency planning has been understood and implemented, as this clearly has an impact on its potential contribution to preparedness and response. In addition, as a basis for making improvements, the evaluation also sought to identify the elements that influence the utility of contingency planning.

The Practice of Contingency Planning in WFP

14. The evaluation found widely differing understandings among staff as to what contingency planning and preparedness constitute. Differing opinions also exist regarding the importance and usefulness of various elements of contingency planning and what contingency planning should focus on, including the extent to which it should focus on operational capacities and administrative concerns in addition to the needs of the population.
15. Differing views were also found regarding when contingency planning should be undertaken. If contingency planning is mandatory, particularly when it is imposed at an inopportune time, it tends to be treated as a bureaucratic requirement only, but when left to be implemented only when needed, it can disappear from the agenda. The evaluation found the need to clarify guidance and decision-making processes to help offices determine when contingency plans should be prepared, and to introduce risk analyses and reviews of the state of preparedness of offices as part of annual country work plan preparation and mid-year review processes.

⁴ To this must be added an unknown number of plans prepared at the country level that were not internally circulated or recorded.



16. Who participates is a key factor in determining the usefulness of a contingency planning process. The evaluation found that participation in WFP contingency planning processes has varied greatly: senior management involvement has ranged from providing leadership in some offices to being unsupportive and disengaged in others. The participation of country office staff has varied from processes involving an entire office staff to the other extreme of the plan being written by a single person or, more commonly, by a small group that merely requests information from others. Contingency planning has been perceived essentially as an internal exercise, with little involvement of partners. To strengthen WFP contingency planning, the issue of participation will need to be addressed, recognizing the importance of senior management's involvement and leadership, the involvement of people representing all critical functions, and the benefits of enhanced involvement of key partners. In sensitive situations, ways need to be found for planning together and sharing essential information, while recognizing the need to treat details of some scenarios as confidential.
17. The evaluation found that the form and content of many contingency plans produced by country offices follow the format defined in the existing contingency planning guidelines, which are generally interpreted as calling for the preparation of detailed plans. Many plans are quite lengthy and detailed, although almost all staff agree that such plans were of little use. As early as 2004, some contingency planning staff began experimenting with alternative formats, using matrices, one-page syntheses and other techniques. Future efforts to improve WFP's preparedness and contingency planning will benefit from drawing on such adaptations innovated by field staff.
18. The evaluation findings reaffirm the widely held belief among humanitarian contingency planners that the process of analysis and planning is more important than the final plan. However, in many cases, contingency planning was undertaken with the sole aim of preparing *a plan*. The evaluators believe the reasons for this include: the way the guidelines are interpreted; requests to the country offices to update their plans; reliance on the existence of contingency plans as the principal measure of preparedness of an office; and insufficient funds for preparedness. It was found that the elaboration of scenarios often consumes undue effort, and generally plays a disproportionate role in the planning process, illustrating the emphasis on development of a plan rather than preparedness.
19. The evaluation found that contingency planning is typically implemented as a distinct, stand-alone planning process with few linkages to either regular planning or other processes related to WFP risk management. Lack of clarity about the relationship between routine planning and contingency planning affects the performance of contingency planning and results in routine planning not benefiting from risk analysis, difficulties in integrating the corrective measures identified in contingency planning into programme processes, and duplicated work. Uncertainties were also unveiled regarding the linkages among contingency planning, business continuity planning, security planning, enterprise risk management and such specialized planning as pandemic planning, all of which require much the same analyses of the risks and vulnerability of WFP capacity.

Organizational Framework

20. On the positive side, contingency planning has contributed to a culture of preparedness across WFP, and staff are supportive of corrective measures to make it even more effective. However, overall, the organization support systems remain weak.
21. With regard to the policy framework, contingency planning has been implemented under WFP's broader preparedness initiative including its emergency preparedness and response



framework. No specific policy or directive exists for preparedness, including contingency planning. Future consideration should be given as to whether a more formalized policy framework would enhance and strengthen current efforts.

22. The evaluation found that staff generally appreciate the existing normative guidance for contingency planning, specifically the Contingency Planning Guidelines issued in 2002, but widely recognize its need of updating. While steps have been taken to supplement this guidance, more fundamental revisions are needed regarding the issues raised in this evaluation, including considering the innovations of field and regional staff to tailor contingency planning to field needs, and greater use needs to be made of simulation exercises.
23. The evaluation found that training to enhance staff skills was systematically organized over the first years of the contingency planning rollout, and participants report that they continue to use the knowledge gained and consider the training useful. However, many interviewees have had no training on contingency planning, as training efforts diminished substantially in recent years, reportedly because of diminishing financial resources. The evaluation found that ongoing skills development in preparedness and contingency planning is clearly needed, most constructively as part of an integrated emergency preparedness and response skills development strategy.
24. Accountability for contingency planning is a core management issue, not merely a bureaucratic task, because it clarifies who will ensure that this analysis and planning activity is appropriately undertaken, along with the actions that follow from it. Apart from the accountability of the head of the office, which is clearly established, the accountability for contingency planning by others, such as technical units, operational units and management, remains ambiguous. The evaluation found that preparedness and contingency planning are included in the generic job descriptions of country directors and logistics officers, but not of other staff. Many staff are not clear as to their roles and responsibilities in contingency planning. In addition to further clarification of related roles and responsibilities, the assessment of risks and preparedness status might be added to key management documents. Although the status of contingency planning is sometimes considered in internal audits, and this can encourage corrective actions, it may be even better to establish systems and tools for measuring the state of preparedness of an office.
25. With regard to Headquarters support of contingency planning efforts, the importance of having a core team of dedicated people with the commensurate experience, skills and level/seniority to guide and support global efforts continues to be recognized, but the evaluation found that the robust support provided to contingency planning by Headquarters staff at the beginning of the initiative has weakened substantially over the past few years, to the point of having no dedicated preparedness/contingency planning staff for nearly two years; corrective measures for this have recently been initiated and the reported cause was financial limitations.
26. Regional bureaux play a critical role in ensuring effective contingency planning, holding functional responsibility for monitoring and supporting country offices in their preparedness and contingency efforts, and lead responsibility for inter-country contingency planning and planning for countries where WFP is not present. Regional bureaux support is recognized as important by the staff interviewed, but its effectiveness depends on the extent to which it adds value and the way in which it is provided. The evaluation found that the support provided is uneven, active in some bureaux, but absent or weak in others. Overall, the support appears to have weakened over the past years, particularly as dedicated external funds decreased. On the positive side, the regional support functions for



preparedness and contingency planning have recently increased again, through regular funds in several bureaux and some supplemental funding.

27. How the contingency planning process is supported at the country office level is also recognized as a contributing factor to the effectiveness of contingency planning. Key elements include who is designated as the office focal point for related functions, and how those functions are performed. The evaluation found that the roles of focal points vary from initiating and facilitating contingency planning, to playing a supportive role, to writing the plan. In addition to personal capacities, performance of this function was found to be influenced by the support received – or not received – from senior management, and the extent of participation from others within the office. Enhanced training and support to focal points and others involved in contingency planning at the country office level can be expected to contribute positively.
28. The link between resources and contingency planning was found critical at two levels: resources to support the contingency planning process; and resources for the ensuing implementation of preparedness actions. The evaluation found contingency planning to have limited usefulness when not linked to the implementation of cost-effective essential preparedness measures identified by contingency planning exercises. Strategies for achieving this are needed, including ways of integrating preparedness and contingency planning into line item budgets, donor support for essential preparedness, and the expanded use of emergency funding mechanisms for preparedness, such as the Immediate Response Account (IRA).
29. The evaluators estimate that between about US\$3 million and US\$5 million per year is being invested in contingency planning, including the costs of staff time, as well as process and material support.⁵ The adequacy of this investment must be judged against an annual WFP budget in excess of US\$5 billion, and the fact that emergency response is a critical part of WFP's mission. The evaluation team believes that the return on investment is worthwhile, as the impact of contingency planning on the effectiveness and efficiency of response exceeds this investment level – potentially within a single emergency. While the impact could be higher with the same level of investment, further investment would generate a more substantial impact.

Contribution to Emergency Preparedness and Response

30. Contingency planning is not an end in itself but a tool to enhance preparedness, thereby contributing to improved response. The evaluation considered various elements of the potential contribution of contingency planning to preparedness, outlined in the following, while recognizing the difficulty of attributing causality.
31. Regarding awareness of threats, the evaluation found that staff who participated actively in contingency planning exercises affirmed that contingency planning enhanced their awareness of potential threats, some considering this to be the most important benefit. However, threat awareness was sometimes incomplete, and potential impacts on food security and on WFP operations were not thoroughly analysed in all cases. In addition,

⁵ This figure assumes 40 country office contingency planning processes, three regional bureaux contingency planning processes and two Headquarters contingency planning processes in a year. It also assumes dedicated resources for contingency planning support at the Headquarters and regional bureau levels: initiative management, full-time or part-time contingency planning focal points, information management, investments in guidelines, tools and technology, etc.



enhanced awareness of risks concerned only the individuals who participated in the contingency planning process, who were often very few.

32. Almost all the interviewees who had experienced a participatory contingency planning exercise affirmed that it helped to achieve common understanding, and sometimes also to build inter-personal relationships that aided coordination and problem-solving in subsequent crises. However, this benefit is limited when only a small group of staff are involved and the planning does not include partners.
33. In considering how contingency planning contributes to specific WFP programme concerns, a review of plans suggests that in many cases contingency planning has focused on estimates of the number of people expected to need assistance and on classic food aid responses, with limited evidence of consideration being given to alternative assistance strategies. Responsibilities have generally been defined, at least in broad terms, while performance in identifying and solving potential problems has been uneven.
34. There is a two-way link between contingency planning and early warning, with contingency planning being triggered by early warnings, while at the same time stimulating early warning processes by identifying indicators to be monitored and triggers for particular preparedness actions. The evaluation found that early warning information is used, and there are various examples of continuing efforts to strengthen early warning systems, including the integration of hazard and risk timelines, regional early warning systems and advanced global early warning systems. However, the evaluation did not find a consistent and direct link between early warning and contingency planning; such a link could be strengthened, along with rationalization of the many early warning systems now functioning at different levels.
35. Three elements related to information were explored: updating baseline information; updating information on partners; and sharing information with partner agencies. Although the updating of some information was found in many contingency planning efforts, the evaluation found little evidence that the baseline data essential to WFP efforts were updated during or as a result of contingency planning – notably comprehensive food security and vulnerability assessment (CFSVA)/vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) data on populations, food security and nutrition conditions, markets, etc.; and logistics capacity assessment data. Ambiguity was found regarding what information should be shared with partners, and partners regretted that WFP did not share more. Although WFP reportedly shares some information when it participates in inter-agency planning processes, partners are not aware of WFP's internal contingency plans and the implications for themselves. To strengthen the contribution of contingency planning, these elements deserve attention: enhancing baseline information; defining what information is essential for partners; and the importance of sharing non-sensitive contingency planning information with partners.
36. Interviews and review of contingency plans suggest that logistics and the practical programming elements of response receive uneven attention in contingency planning, with a more proactive approach for logistics concerns. Enhancing programme-related contingency planning was considered by many to be an area for potential improvement. Other issues that deserve consideration in efforts to improve the effectiveness of contingency planning include establishing arrangements in advance with partners, and the challenge of contingency planning in offices with very small staffs and operations.
37. One indicator of the changes induced by contingency planning is the degree to which the preparedness actions identified as needed during the contingency planning process are implemented. Most contingency plans reviewed recommended preparedness measures, but



few of these were actually implemented in the country offices visited, for reasons that include insufficient resources, lack of management commitment, and the view that the plan was complete without such follow-up action.

38. As well as the contribution to preparedness, this evaluation was concerned with contingency planning's contribution to humanitarian response. Establishing direct causality is obviously difficult, and may perhaps only be established by real-time evaluations of emergency operations. However, this evaluation attempted to establish evidence as to whether contingency planning affected the timeliness, appropriateness and/or effectiveness of humanitarian responses, based on the perceptions of actors and observers.
39. During field interviews in which evaluators could probe and validate the opinions expressed, opinions differed, with some holding that contingency planning had little impact on response, while a majority affirmed that contingency planning does – or can – make a difference, depending on how it is implemented. Although based mainly on anecdotal evidence, most interviewees referred to timely food delivery as a principle and likely impact on response, while appropriateness was not often dealt with successfully in the contingency planning process.
40. Few contingency plans seem to have been used as a basis for an operational plan or emergency operation (EMOP) document, even in the event of a crisis broadly similar to that planned for. Most interviewees within and outside WFP agreed that plans are rarely used as operational guides. A comparison of responses in two countries – one where WFP had invested in contingency planning and the other not – supports the contention that the quality of response is not significantly influenced by the existence of a contingency plan, even though staff competencies may be strengthened through the contingency planning process.

Contribution to Inter-Agency Processes

41. Inter-agency efforts should enhance the collective efforts of all the parties working together and, at the same time, enhance WFP's specific efforts. Experience confirms that achieving both aims in inter-agency contingency planning often proves a challenge. However, the potentially positive benefits of coherent, collaborative multi-agency efforts are so compelling that inter-agency contingency planning has wide support, encouraged by United Nations reform processes. In considering WFP's contribution to this growing field, it merits note that the expectation of more dynamic inter-agency efforts has grown substantially over the period covered by the evaluation; second, as inter-agency contingency planning in the field has emerged comparatively recently, various inter-agency processes are still developing, including the cluster approach, regional inter-agency preparedness and contingency planning groups, and inter-agency simulations.
42. WFP played an important role in promoting and developing global guidance for inter-agency contingency planning. In the early years, WFP often played a lead or facilitation role in the contingency planning efforts of United Nations country teams – frequently together with UNICEF or UNHCR – but the evaluation found this to be the exception over the last few years, although WFP has contributed to as many inter-agency plans as it has prepared WFP plans. Many staff interviewed believed that WFP should participate in and support inter-agency contingency planning. However, when the inter-agency process is poorly implemented it is of little added value to WFP efforts, a conclusion supported by other agencies. There is need to ensure greater complementarity between the inter-agency and WFP's own processes, along the lines proposed in the inter-agency contingency planning guidelines. Greater clarity is also needed on WFP's



contingency planning-related role as leader or co-leader of the country-level food security, logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall Assessment

43. The following conclusions apply to most of the countries visited, and there seems little reason to believe the situation would be different in many other countries. Overall, the contingency planning implemented by WFP until now has had relatively limited impact in terms of such concrete preparedness enhancements as pre-positioning of stocks, logistics arrangements, improved access to sources of information, and pre-approved agreements with partners or authorities. Such contributions have been realized in only a minority of cases and primarily when planning was undertaken for well-defined, imminent threats. However, depending on the extent of participation in the process, benefits have been generated in terms of greater awareness of risks, anticipation of some problems, and improved understanding of potential response strategies among participants, as well as team building and improved coordination within WFP and with partners. The evaluation also concluded that contingency planning itself, as a separate activity, had little impact on response. The benefits that could be identified related to the timeliness rather than the appropriateness of response. Plans themselves were almost never used.
44. At the *country* level, contingency planning has been used as a primary tool to enhance preparedness. Its impact was found to depend on such factors as the commitment of the country director, the way the process was conducted, the extent to which it was adapted to the situation and needs of the country office at the time, and the support and resources made available. At the *regional* level, support has varied in the last three to four years, depending on the priority given to preparedness, including contingency planning, by regional directors and staff, and the extra-budgetary resources the office has been able to raise for related activities, particularly since expiry of the initial DFID-funded ISP. At the *corporate* level, there have also been some notable specific corporate contingency planning efforts, including for emergencies in Iraq and the Sudan.
45. At all levels, it is recognized that the current profusion of different, apparently unrelated – and certainly uncoordinated – Headquarters-inspired initiatives in relation to pandemic planning, business continuity planning, risk management and security management, in addition to contingency planning, is confusing for country offices and is inefficient. It is also recognized that it would be beneficial to link the contingency planning process – and more specifically risk analysis and preparedness assessment – more closely to routine planning processes, especially annual work plans. Enterprise risk management is an organizational initiative that aims to improve coherence among the various risk planning practices. At the same time, initiatives taken in the last few years by several country offices and regional emergency preparedness and response officers provide valuable indications for possible ways forward towards more flexible contingency and preparedness planning processes.
46. It is worth reiterating that the process itself has been useful. The evaluation conclusion can best be summarized by paraphrasing a country director: “Often emergencies turn out to be completely different from the plan. A contingency plan is too theoretical and gets into useless details. However, thanks to the contingency planning exercise, the office and partners have already an idea of what to do, even if the idea has to be readjusted.” The



challenge for WFP is to maintain this consultative process without the burden of detailed contingency plans when these are not necessary. The evaluators take as their own the conclusions of some interlocutors that a detailed plan is best prepared only for threats that are almost certain and well-defined. In other cases, a shift to general preparedness planning associated with other tools would be more suitable; simulations deserve integration as a core preparedness tool.

Recommendations

47. The evaluators propose three overall, strategic recommendations, each with a number of associated operational recommendations:
48. **Recommendation 1.** Re-conceptualize contingency planning from a stand-alone operational planning activity to an element in an integrated strategic problem-solving process conducted within an overall inter-agency framework. Specific operational recommendations include:
- i) Focus on the objective of ensuring that WFP (and particularly each WFP country office) is aware of potential risks and prepared to respond appropriately when needed. Prepare detailed contingency plans only for imminent or well-defined threats. Develop and use other tools to ensure awareness and more general preparedness. Update the Emergency Preparedness and Response Framework (EPRF) accordingly.
 - ii) Establish risk analysis and preparedness review – followed by contingency planning when needed – as an integral part of regular planning, management and reporting processes.
 - iii) Integrate current contingency planning activities, pandemic planning, business continuity planning, security planning and risk management in a combined analysis and planning framework, in particular at country office level.
 - iv) Reorient contingency planning more specifically to anticipate and solve potential problems and build preparedness capacities.
 - v) Continue to be proactive in supporting and seeking inter-agency contingency planning and ensure that risk analysis and contingency planning by WFP complements (does not duplicate) inter-agency efforts, including those of clusters.
 - vi) Reinforce the links between contingency planning and current and emerging early-warning systems within WFP and at the inter-agency level. Assure reporting on the evolving situation and preparedness action taken, or the reasons for inaction.
49. **Recommendation 2.** Reaffirm and consolidate commitment to and support and accountability for preparedness, including contingency planning, as and when appropriate. Specific operational recommendations include:
- i) Re-affirm the priority that WFP accords to being prepared to respond to humanitarian crises and needs using all relevant tools including contingency planning when appropriate; develop quality indicators; and clearly define responsibilities with related accountabilities and incentives for staff in all functional areas.
 - ii) Ensure, as a core function within WFP: i) the provision of necessary technical support to country offices (and regional bureaux) to facilitate risk analysis, preparedness and contingency planning processes; and ii) systems to monitor the quality of the outputs of those processes and ensure the learning and dissemination of lessons and the sharing of experiences among regional bureaux and country offices.



- iii) Assure adequate long-term funding for the technical support and other functions outlined in these recommendations, and for specific contingency planning exercises as required.
 - iv) Include assessment of the role and impact of prior contingency planning and related preparedness measures in the terms of reference of all future evaluations of emergency operations (EMOPs) and any protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) for which there has been a budget revision to respond to a new crisis during the period under review.
 - v) Establish cost–benefit measurement processes at the country office level to be able to assess the value of contingency planning against investment in the activity.
50. **Recommendation 3.** Build on field experience and initiatives to update the guidance materials and develop skills while institutionalizing the recommended revised approach. Specific operational recommendations include:
- i) Update the contingency planning guidelines and further develop the on-line tool kit to reflect the re-conceptualization proposed above, incorporate field experience, and emphasize the analysis of food security implications, response options, the anticipation of potential problems and the identification of ways to avoid or minimize such problems.
 - ii) Review policies and recent practice and develop practical guidance on how to ensure confidentiality for sensitive scenarios while encouraging the widest possible participation in preparedness reviews and contingency planning.
 - iii) Ensure appropriate skills development among staff in all functional areas, and include modules on preparedness and contingency planning in existing training activities.
 - iv) Consolidate arrangements and practices for inter-country contingency planning and planning for situations that may become corporate emergencies.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CFSVA	comprehensive food security and vulnerability assessment
DFID	Department for International Development [United Kingdom]
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EMOP	emergency operation
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICT	information and communications technology
IRA	Immediate Response Account
ISP	Institutional Strategy Paper
NGO	non-governmental organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAM	vulnerability analysis and mapping