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Agenda Item 6

WFP/EB.2/2016/6-C

Evaluation Reports

For consideration

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

Synthesis Report of 2015–2016 Operation Evaluations

Partnerships for the Future

Executive Summary

This report synthesizes the findings of 15 WFP operation evaluations conducted during 2015–2016. The operations had combined requirements of over *USD 2.6 billion*, directly targeted more than *18 million beneficiaries* and were implemented in diverse country contexts.

Overall, the third year of this synthesis report finds WFP's corporate shift from food aid to food assistance now accelerating. WFP's evolution to an *enabling partner*, observed in the 2015 synthesis, is confirmed and consolidated by this cohort of operations. Acting within policy spaces, a range of advocacy and technical assistance roles have been adroitly deployed to help build durable change.

The majority of evaluations were mid-term, affecting the results data available. For directly targeted beneficiaries, and as in previous operation evaluation syntheses, nutrition and school feeding activities performed consistently against coverage targets. However, WFP continued to serve beneficiaries with fewer food assistance transfers than planned. Some significant contributions were made to national food and nutrition security policy and accountability frameworks, while work in resilience and disaster risk reduction gained momentum, supported by enabling roles adopted. Gender results were still mainly quantitatively reported, although this year's synthesis sees emerging transformative gains. Cash-based transfers showed many positive effects.

Under difficult operating conditions, external challenges – including political upheaval and conflict – continued to constrain performance. However, policy, political and other factors associated with more strategic models of partnership also affected results. Attention to cost-efficiency saw notable improvements in 2016.

WFP's comparative advantages – its confidence, agility and willingness to innovate, alongside its resolute commitment to those it serves – continue to be reflected in this cohort of operations. However, the evidence finds in 2016 that WFP's swift operational adaptation has outpaced some

In line with the Evaluation Policy (2016–2021) (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1), to respect the integrity and independence of evaluation findings some language contained in this report may not be standard WFP terminology; please direct any requests for clarification to the WFP Director of Evaluation.

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technical capacities. Design – raised in three successive years of this synthesis – continues to lack rigour, including a sufficient evidence base and detailed logic chains. Capacity development, also previously raised, lacks a clear diagnostic or strategy, with activities piecemeal rather than systemic. Committed alliances with government have supported results, but partnerships are not yet fully inclusive. Planning for sustainability and hand-over is manifestly insufficient.

This third synthesis in the series finds WFP’s adoption of an enabling, rather than a purely delivery, model successfully helping build nationally owned food and nutrition security systems, where conditions permit. However, while positioning it well for the era of the Sustainable Development Goals, WFP’s assets and capacities require firmer harnessing to safeguard future results. The lessons presented in this synthesis aim to support WFP as it continues to evolve.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of “Synthesis Report of 2015–2016 Operation Evaluations” (WFP/EB.2/2016/6-C) taking into account considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

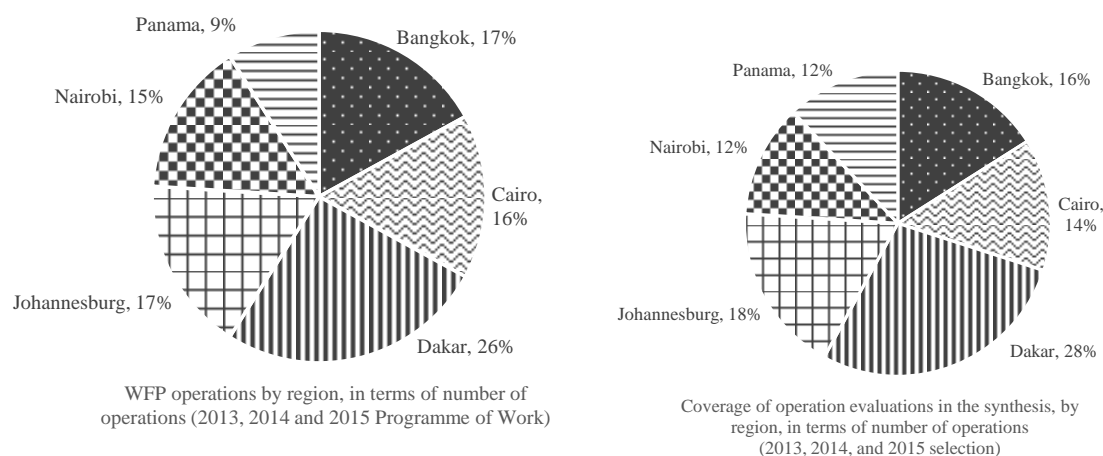
Introduction

1. The 2030 Agenda’s ambitious call to action proposes “bold and transformative steps” to end global poverty and hunger. Under increasingly complex and diverse conditions, and amid its corporate transition from food aid to food assistance, WFP’s operations seek to serve the world’s most vulnerable.
2. This third annual operation evaluation synthesis analyses the findings of 15 evaluations of WFP operations conducted from mid-2015 to mid-2016. Describing performance and extracting lessons, it aims to support accountability, contribute to learning, and help WFP realize its objectives and mandate for the people it serves.

Operation Evaluations

3. The operation evaluations series was launched by WFP’s Office of Evaluation (OEV) in 2013. Figure 1 shows the regional distribution of the series in terms of numbers of operations in WFP’s Programme of Work for 2013–2015.

Figure 1: WFP operations and operation evaluations, by region, 2013–2015



The cohort of 15 operations

4. The 15 operations evaluated had combined requirements of over USD 2.6 billion, directly targeting more than 18 million beneficiaries from 2013 to 2016. Table 1 shows their key features.

TABLE 1: FEATURES OF THE OPERATIONS EVALUATED

	Ukraine	Afghanistan	Central America	Ethiopia	Gambia	Liberia	Niger	Rwanda	Bhutan	Côte d'Ivoire	Sao Tome and Principe	Egypt	Lesotho	Nicaragua	Senegal
Programme type	EMOP	PRRO	PRRO	PRRO	PRRO	PRRO	PRRO	PRRO	DEV	DEV	DEV	CP	CP	CP	CP
Income status*	Mid	Low	Mid	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Mid	Mid	Mid	Mid	Mid	Mid	Mid
Fragile state**		√		√		√	√			√		√			
Affected by recurrent natural disasters***		√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√				√	√
Refugee focus				√		√		√							
Country office size****	N/A	Very large	Small/ med.	Very large	Very small	Med.	Very large	Med.	Very small	Med.	Very small	Large	Small	Small	Med.

* http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups#Low_income

** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2015. Based on World Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank. 2014 and 2015. Harmonized List of Fragile Situations.

*** World Risk Index.

**** WFP Resource Management Integration and Support Division classification 2016. Ukraine not classified.

Med. = medium

- As in previous synthesis reports, operations were implemented in diverse contexts. Five experienced political instability and two insecurity and conflict, while five benefited from stable governance during implementation. Three – in Ethiopia, Liberia and Rwanda – focused mainly on refugee populations.

Methodology

- The 2016 synthesis applied the same standard methods as previously, including a structured analytical framework and systematic data extraction. Evidence was rated for validity and reliability on a scale of 1 (low) to 4 (high), with only reliable evidence – scoring at least 2 – included. Findings were triangulated with Standard Project Reports (SPRs), where appropriate, and were validated by OEV.
- Limitations include this report's dependence on its component studies. Results data, still variably reported, were generated from SPRs, triangulated with evaluations. The majority (11/15) of the evaluations were mid-term, limiting final results data. Findings of this synthesis reflect only the 15 operations evaluated, and not WFP's full global portfolio.

Design and Strategic Positioning

Relevance of Design

8. The humanitarian/development profile of the 15 operations broadly matches that of the 2015 operation evaluations cohort. Operation types were fully appropriate for context. Seven operations were designed within the framework of country strategies, although these only informed design in Afghanistan and Lesotho.
9. The Annex lists the activities and modalities employed. Overall:
 - six operations geared direct assistance primarily to a single activity, in five cases school feeding;
 - eleven designs included nutrition¹ activities although these were only implemented in eight operations, twelve included school feeding and ten food assistance for asset creation/training – implemented in seven operations. General distribution was designed and implemented in only seven operations, including all three refugee operations and to meet specific needs in Afghanistan, Central America, the Niger and Ukraine;
 - capacity development was designed and applied in all operations apart from the short-term emergency operation in Ukraine and the refugee operations in Liberia and Rwanda; and
 - eleven operation designs included cash-based transfers, although these were implemented only as a pilot in Egypt and were not implemented in Côte d'Ivoire.

Degree of Ambition

10. As in previous operation evaluation syntheses, the 15 operations sought ambitious coverage of needs. Nearly 7 million vulnerable people were targeted in the Niger, and 4 million in Afghanistan. In Liberia and Rwanda, WFP covered the entire camp-based refugee population, and in Ethiopia it provided food to more than half a million eligible people.
11. Five evaluations questioned the scale of this ambition. Despite a challenging funding environment, the Niger design was three times the scale of its predecessor, reflecting resilience-building needs and strategic opportunities in context. Low previous funding levels in Senegal were a lesson “not taken on board” for design. Refugee operations in Rwanda and Ethiopia planned for the worst, based on figures from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, but experienced lower than expected caseloads, emphasizing the need for explicit contingency plans and/or the use of budget revisions when caseloads vary against plan.

Evidence Base for Designs

12. The theme of a weak or inconsistent evidence base for design reoccurs in this third synthesis in the series. While ten operations applied vulnerability analysis and mapping, including comprehensive food security and vulnerability assessment data, and nine used multiple information sources to ensure that designs responded to needs, six evaluations still found shortcomings. These included shallow or incomplete analysis of needs, sometimes of particular vulnerable groups, and insufficient use of available learning and evidence, including from evaluations. This reduced the quality and relevance of designs.

¹ Including HIV/AIDS activities.

Good practice 1: Evidence-based preparation

Following the Crimea crisis in March 2014, WFP's Cairo Regional Bureau initiated a number of preparedness activities in the Ukraine, including mapping of the evidence base. These proactive early actions facilitated the design and early phases of WFP's emergency responses in eastern Ukraine.

In the Niger, extensive analysis of the food security situation, including participatory approaches and mapping of food insecurity trends, informed design of the operation.

13. Only the Egypt and Niger operations explicitly applied gender analysis to inform design, compared with one operation in the 2015 synthesis. This analysis was shallow and/or limited in nine operations, lacking insight into structural gender barriers and specific vulnerabilities. However, efforts were made to expand gender analysis during implementation in two other operations – Nicaragua and Ukraine.

Responding to Needs

14. *Objectives and activities*: Previous syntheses in this series found broadly relevant operational objectives, but with limitations at the activity level. The 2016 synthesis finds similarly, with relevant objectives in all 15 operations, but the premise for operation design and/or choice of programmatic options assumed rather than explicitly tested in eight. Linked to the weak evidence bases discussed in the previous section, these untested assumptions resulted in questionable relevance. For example:
 - in Bhutan, Egypt and Rwanda, the rationale for school feeding as an incentive for enrolment or attendance in school was not based on a complete understanding of needs; and
 - in Liberia, WFP provided general food distribution as “continuous relief” for refugees, without reviewing other livelihood options. This compromised appropriateness and affected WFP's credibility with donors.
15. *Targeting* was appropriately designed overall in six operations. However, ten evaluations – more than in previous years – identified challenges. Linked to limited evidence bases, these included the potential exclusion of vulnerable groups, mismatches between targeting intentions and national food insecurity patterns, and tensions between national/local targeting criteria and those of WFP.
16. *Transfer modalities* as in previous syntheses, were largely appropriate in 2016, with a planned shift to cash-based transfers commended in three operations. However, WFP sometimes faced limited choice: in Afghanistan, in-kind donations were supplied despite the Government's preference for cash-based assistance; while in Nicaragua, national authorities restricted WFP to in-kind transfers, despite successful piloting of cash-based transfers.
17. *Internal synergies* continued to be limited in 2016. Of the 11 multi-component operations, only those in Ethiopia and the Niger were well integrated; both were supported by wider United Nations coherence efforts. Seven operations missed opportunities to make internal connections, such as between resilience activities in Egypt, or from education to nutrition in Nicaragua.

Strategic Positioning and Intended Partnerships

18. The 2015 synthesis noted WFP's progressive shift from “implementer to enabler”. All designs in this cohort were well-aligned with national policy frameworks and objectives, but some showed a more proactively strategic approach:
 - Six operations were designed jointly or in very close partnership with government.
 - Six were geared to help develop national policy frameworks for school feeding, nutrition and/or disaster risk reduction.
 - Six of the twelve nutrition interventions and eight of the eleven school feeding activities were delivered directly through national programmes.

19. As partnerships become more strategic, however, evaluations in the 2016 cohort found policy and political factors affecting design. In Nicaragua, planned food assistance for assets and training programmes were not initiated, because conditional targeting modalities did not eventually align with government priorities. In Côte d'Ivoire, where WFP sought to balance its roles as a provider of technical advice and a capacity development agent, its alignment with the national targeting strategy was considered to potentially disadvantage poor rural schools.
20. Two evaluations commented on WFP's chosen role in the country: WFP's engagement in Ukraine – a food-surplus middle-income country during a political emergency – was questioned; as was the need for continuous general food assistance to Ivorian refugees in Liberia.

Capacity Development Intentions

21. Finally, and also connected to WFP's ongoing shift from implementer to enabler, capacity development intentions featured strongly in this cohort. In nine operations, these were geared to disaster risk reduction or management and/or resilience; in three, to hand-over of school feeding programmes. However, as in previous years, widespread shortcomings in capacity development designs were identified, including the lack of a comprehensive diagnostic; the absence of a clearly articulated strategy or implementation plan; and few clear objectives, intended targets or results.

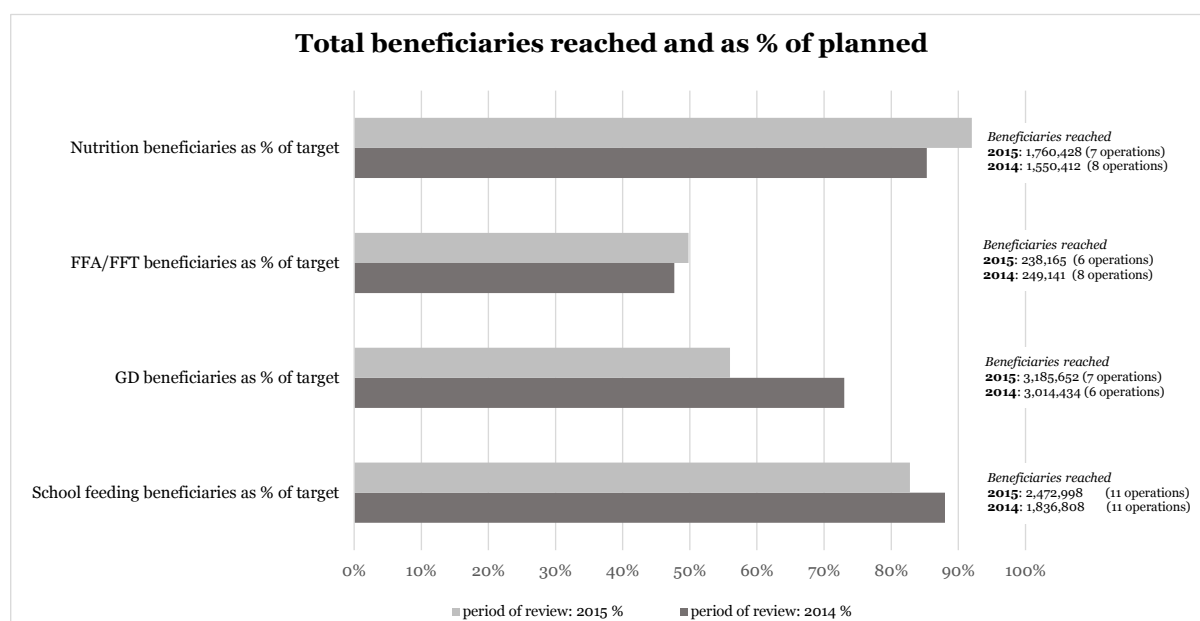
Results

22. The availability of results data has improved since the first operation evaluation synthesis in 2014.² However, data quality concerns persist, particularly at the outcome level. The limitations identified in 13 of the evaluations in this synthesis were similar to those of previous years, including internal discrepancies in the data; lack of robust baselines; concerns over evidence sources; and challenges in attributing effects to WFP interventions.
23. Monitoring systems reflect improvements recorded in previous syntheses in this series, being commended in six operations but with weaknesses identified in nine. The 2016 synthesis finds data management and analysis challenges, including weak or non-integrated databases, weak consolidation or disaggregation, and limited analysis and use of data in planning and design. Questions are also raised in 2016 about rationales for outcome target setting, with unrealistically low targets set in Afghanistan, Côte d'Ivoire and The Gambia, and unrealistically high ones in Senegal.

Outputs

24. For directly targeted beneficiaries, Figure 2 shows the absolute numbers and percentages of beneficiaries reached against targets for general distribution, school feeding, nutrition and food assistance for asset creation/training in 2014 and 2015. Caseloads varied significantly against plans in ten operations, owing to changing flows of refugees or internally displaced persons, natural disasters, funding constraints, institutional delays, and/or changes in the pace of hand-over to government.

²Nine operations revised their indicators during implementation to align with the 2014–2017 Strategic Results Framework.

Figure 2: Beneficiaries, by activity area, 2014 and 2015

FFA: food assistance for assets
 FFT: food assistance for training
 GD: general distribution

25. No activity area within this cohort exceeded its target beneficiary numbers. Nutrition and school feeding, as in previous syntheses, most consistently approached targets against plan. The largest shortfall was in food assistance for asset creation/training in 2014, because of funding constraints. General distribution reached 73 percent of planned beneficiaries in 2014 and 56 percent in 2015, owing to lower than anticipated caseloads, implementation challenges and lack of funding.
26. *Commodity volumes and frequency.* For reasons described in the section on Explanatory Factors, syntheses in this series have consistently found WFP serving its beneficiaries with less food than planned. This continues in 2016, with 52 percent of intended volumes delivered over the period covered by the evaluations. All operations experienced one or more of: reduced duration of assistance, sometimes by several months; reduced frequency of distribution; and reduced rations and/or calorific value.
27. *Commodity suitability.* Also reflecting the findings of previous years, recipients reported food baskets as satisfactory in seven operations. In Côte d'Ivoire and Sao Tome and Principe, although rice was preferred, evaluations noted that its presence in school meals could devalue traditional foods.
28. *Cash and voucher transfers* continued to increase in volume, with operations disbursing USD 57 million in total during 2015–2016, 47 percent of WFP's combined targets for the 15 operations. As in previous years, however, this figure masks wide variations, from 2 percent of target in Egypt to 91 percent in Lesotho. Many positive effects were recorded, including the stimulation of local markets, reduced selling of commodities, improved dignity and empowerment, and increased control over resources for women (Gender, paragraphs 37–40).

Outcomes

29. Outcome data were more readily available than in previous syntheses, although quality challenges persist (paragraph 23). Evaluations' mid-term status meant that ten operations lacked final results data.

30. Table 2 compares the performance of these 15 evaluated operations, recognizing their diverse contexts and different reporting periods, with achievements against corporate-wide performance reported in WFP's Annual Performance Report (APR) 2015. The same methodology as the APR was applied.³

TABLE 2: OUTCOME PERFORMANCE FOR THE 15 OPERATIONS COMPARED TO 2015 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE				
Strategic Objective/Outcome	Relevant operations (of 15)	Operations with sufficient data to report progress	Cohort performance rating	Corporate performance (2015 APR)
Strategic Objective 1: Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies				
Outcome 1.1: Stabilized or reduced undernutrition	3	3		
Outcome 1.2: Stabilized/improved food consumption	6	6		
Outcome 1.3: Access to basic services/community assets	0	N/A	N/A	
Outcome 1.4: Institutions prepared for emergencies	1	1		
Strategic Objective 2: Support or restore food security and nutrition and establish or rebuild livelihoods in fragile settings and following emergencies				
Outcome 2.1: Adequate food consumption reached	1	1		
Outcome 2.2: Access to assets/basic services	3	3		
Outcome 2.3: Stabilized or reduced undernutrition	1	1		
Outcome 2.4: Capacity to meet national food insecurity needs	0	N/A	N/A	
Strategic Objective 3: Reduce risk and enable people, communities and countries to meet their own food and nutrition needs				
Outcome 3.1: Improved access to livelihood assets	5	2		
Outcome 3.2: Increased marketing opportunities for producers and traders	3	3		
Outcome 3.3: Risk reduction capacity strengthened	1	1		
Strategic Objective 4: Reduce undernutrition and break the intergenerational cycle of hunger				
Outcome 4.1: Reduced undernutrition	7	5		
Outcome 4.2: Increased access education	10	10		
Outcome 4.3: Capacity to reduce undernutrition/access to education	5	4		



Achieved target or on track to achieve target



Evidence of some progress but targets have not been met or progress towards targets is slow



Insufficient data available

31. Performance of these 15 operations broadly reflects corporate-wide performance as assessed in the 2015 APR. WFP's traditional areas of strength, Strategic Objectives 1 and 2, show consistently available evidence and strong achievements. Positive performance under

³ This four-step process is described at: <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/eb/wfp282360.pdf>

Outcome 1.2 for example was helped by improved dietary diversity scores in six operations and increased food consumption scores in four.

32. Strategic Objectives 3 and 4 see weaker evidence availability and more variable achievement. Only two operations reported on Outcome 3.1, with three others experiencing late starts, lack of monitoring and/or lack of tangible evidence. Fewer operations reported on progress than targeted Outcomes 4.1 and 4.3. The strongest evidence occurs under Outcome 4.2 on increased access to education, where school enrolment and retention improved in six operations each.

Under-Reporting and Under-Representation

33. First noted in the 2014 Synthesis, under-reporting⁴ in 2016 continues to decrease, particularly since capacity development results are now integrated within the 2014–2017 Strategic Results Framework. Nonetheless, some results remain under-represented⁵ in 2016, with evaluations uncovering valuable contributions to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and Zero Hunger Challenge targets (Table 3).

TABLE 3: EXAMPLES OF UNCAPTURED OUTCOME RESULTS	
SDG 1: No poverty ZHC: 100 percent increase in smallholder productivity/income	Strengthened economic activity – Afghanistan, Central America, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, the Niger, Rwanda, Senegal Increased/diversified agricultural production – Afghanistan, Nicaragua, the Niger, Rwanda, Senegal Increased household incomes/reduced indebtedness – the Niger, Senegal Increased resilience through environmental/climate protection measures – Central America, Egypt, Liberia, the Niger
SDG 2: Zero hunger ZHC: 100 percent access to adequate food	Stabilized food prices – the Niger Increased availability of commodities – Senegal
SDG 3: Good health and well-being	Increased access to/uptake of health services – Afghanistan, The Gambia, Lesotho
SDG 4: Quality education	Reduced absenteeism/increased attendance at school – Afghanistan, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, The Gambia, Nicaragua, the Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe
Other	Improved social cohesion – Ethiopia, Liberia, the Niger, Rwanda, Senegal

ZHC = Zero Hunger Challenge.

34. Five evaluations in this cohort also report missed opportunities for results. These include: greater advocacy with Government for respecting rights and obligations in Ukraine; stronger engagement in decentralization in Senegal; adaptation of delivery models to contexts in Sao Tome and Principe; and emphasizing self-reliance for refugees in Liberia and Rwanda.

Resilience⁶

35. In Egypt, the Niger and Senegal, WFP activities contributed to increased resilience among vulnerable groups. Activities in Afghanistan and Liberia were not designed within a resilience framework, but positive effects were achieved. However, in Lesotho, where the concept was new to both WFP and the Government, activities were not effective in building resilience or reducing disaster risk.

⁴ Under-reporting refers to results that are part of the corporate reporting system and are evidenced in evaluations but not tracked in the monitoring system of the country office or operation.

⁵ Under-representation refers to results that are not included in WFP’s corporate reporting system, but for which evaluations found evidence of achievement.

⁶ Resilience is defined as by the operations themselves.

36. Under difficult funding conditions, five operations prioritized life-saving interventions over resilience activities. Evaluations in 2016 noted the difficult trade-offs involved, pointing out that despite being a global policy priority, donor funding streams for resilience have not yet caught up to match.

Gender, Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations

Gender

37. The limited gender sensitivity identified in previous synthesis reports continues in 2016, with only three evaluations – of 14 reporting – finding implementation geared to clear intended gender – including qualitative – results, and efforts to monitor and report on these. Six operations adopted a mainly quantitative “including women” perspective, while two were essentially gender-blind. The Nicaragua, Senegal and Ukraine operations intensified their gender focus during implementation, although gaps remained.
38. Results for the cohort against the three corporate gender indicators⁷ showed strongest progress in “women making decisions over the use of cash, vouchers or food within the household” – 80 percent in the eight relevant operations – and in “proportion of women in leadership positions of project management committees”, 84 percent in the 11 relevant operations. “Proportion of men making decisions over the use of resources” rated lowest, at 55 percent in the five relevant operations.
39. Limitations in WFP’s corporate performance indicators for gender, which address practical rather than strategic needs, were raised in the 2015 synthesis. Five evaluations in this cohort make the same point, although others reveal transformative gains emerging. While still nascent, these include:
- changes in domestic roles/division of labour in Central America and the Niger;
 - adoption of leadership roles in Liberia; and
 - attitudinal changes in Egypt and Rwanda.
40. The risks of inadequately analysing the cultural dimensions of gender are reflected in unintended effects in at least three operations in this cohort. Examples include the following:
- In Côte d’Ivoire, WFP inadvertently reinforced cultural gender stereotypes by soliciting in-kind contributions to school canteens from women’s groups “for the good of the community”, but without financial remuneration. This undermined women’s livelihoods and risked accentuating existing gender disparities.
 - In Afghanistan, livelihood activities for disaster risk reduction and resilience comprised mainly outdoor manual labour. Because of cultural norms, only 5 percent of participants were women.

Protection

41. Seven evaluations in 2016 reported on protection. Findings were mixed, with no adverse effects in Nicaragua and Rwanda; targets met despite challenging conditions in Ukraine; reorientation to address emerging needs in Central America; and insufficient attention to specific protection issues in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Liberia.

Accountability to affected populations

42. Performance here was similarly mixed. Five evaluations found close engagement with communities for planning and implementation, and complaints/feedback mechanisms were established in Central America and Rwanda. However, food availability/entitlements were inadequately communicated in five others. National restrictions prevented awareness-raising in Ukraine.

⁷ Applying the same methodology as in the APR.

Building Enabling Environments

43. As WFP evolves from “implementer to enabler”, evaluations in 2016 record continued progress beyond immediate results for beneficiaries towards valuable contributions to enhanced national policy and accountability environments.

Education	Development of national policy and/or accountability instruments for school feeding – Bhutan, Côte d’Ivoire, Lesotho, the Niger, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal
Social protection	National protocols applying WFP guidance/implementation modalities – Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal
Nutrition	Alignment of national nutrition policy with international standards – Rwanda, Senegal
Disaster preparedness/risk reduction	Improved national planning and management instruments – Afghanistan, Central America, The Gambia, the Niger

44. Despite design weaknesses, evaluations recorded significant capacity development gains at the national and local levels, although most of these focused on individual units or departments (Table 5).

Emergency preparedness	Afghanistan, Central America, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Senegal, Ukraine
Food security monitoring/analytical capacity	Central America, Egypt, The Gambia, Lesotho, the Niger, Sao Tome and Principe
Disaster management capability	Afghanistan, Central America, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Lesotho, the Niger
Planning and managing for resilience	Central America, Egypt, the Niger, Senegal
Procurement, logistics (including food fortification)	Egypt, the Niger, Senegal

Good practice 2: Capacity development

In Senegal, WFP used the budget revision tool to increase emphasis on institutional capacity development. It increased the operation’s budget by USD 1.6 million and intensified advocacy for the creation of national social protection systems, including a national school feeding programme and cash transfers, as well as working on the development of local procurement and early warning systems.

45. However, as in previous syntheses, familiar technical weaknesses in capacity development work are recorded. These were linked to weak designs (see section on Design and Strategic Positioning), and include targeting of individual units or sectors rather than adoption of a systems approach; limited scale in relation to needs; and a narrow interpretation of capacity development as “training”.
46. Local purchase was also implemented in 10 of the 15 operations in the 2016 synthesis, compared with four in 2015. Proportions ranged from 10 percent of commodities in Rwanda to 100 percent in Egypt and Ukraine.

Preparing for Hand-Over

47. Sustainability/hand-over has been consistently assessed as weak by syntheses in this series. This continues in 2016, with only four operations successfully implementing strategies for sustainability and/or making strong progress on hand-over.

Good practice 3: Hand-over

In Egypt, the integration of WFP activities with government policies and strategies has helped prepare for hand-over. Many activities implemented or prompted by WFP are now day-to-day practices for government institutions, partners and participants. Examples include the use of systems and methodologies for food security monitoring designed in coordination with WFP, and the prioritization of climate-smart agricultural practices throughout governorates.

48. Even where operations were linked to national programmes, 10 of 14 operations lacked fully integrated approaches to sustainability and/or were inadequately prepared for hand-over. This occurred even where hand-over was definitively planned, such as in Bhutan and Sao Tome and Principe.
49. Evaluations in this cohort also emphasized the need to prepare for departure. While recognizing national capacity limitations, evaluations recommended a shift from direct delivery towards an enabling model in Afghanistan, Lesotho, Sao Tome and Principe and Ukraine; a swift phase-out in Liberia; and development of a “disengagement strategy” for assisted communities in the Niger.

Working in Partnership

50. Choice of partners. Syntheses in this series have consistently commended WFP’s strong partnerships with host governments during implementation. This pattern continues in 2016, with relationships at the national, regional and local levels described as “close”, “collegial” and “based on mutual respect”.
51. Relationships with partner United Nations agencies remained inconsistent in 2016, with positive collaboration in three operations but missed opportunities or design-stage intentions unfulfilled in ten. Relationships with cooperating partners, assessed in five evaluations, were mixed, being “positive and productive” in Rwanda, but hindered by short-term administrative arrangements in Senegal and by bureaucratic/communication delays in Afghanistan, Egypt and The Gambia.
52. Acting as an enabler. Continuing the trend identified in 2015, this 2016 synthesis finds WFP acting increasingly as an enabling partner to governments, where conditions permit. Six evaluations observed an additional role, as advocate for food security and nutrition.

WFP AS AN ENABLING PARTNER

Enabling roles adopted

Advocating for food security and nutrition – Afghanistan, Central America, Côte d’Ivoire, Lesotho, Senegal

Convening multi-sectoral dialogue on food security, nutrition and disaster preparedness – Afghanistan, Egypt, The Gambia, Lesotho

Brokering knowledge, providing access to international experience, technically advanced advice and cutting-edge methods and tools – Afghanistan, Central America, Egypt, Ethiopia, The Gambia, the Niger, Senegal, Ukraine

Modelling replicable approaches – Central America, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Niger, Rwanda

Supplying detailed information on food security and nutrition – Afghanistan, Central America, Egypt, Lesotho, Nicaragua, the Niger, Senegal, Ukraine

Pilot testing innovation – Afghanistan, Central America, Egypt, the Niger, Rwanda, Senegal

Examples from evaluations

Food security advocacy. In Senegal, WFP advocated for the adoption of a national school feeding programme, including by hosting an international forum on school feeding

Brokering knowledge. In Egypt, WFP provided sophisticated methodological tools for gathering and analysing food security data, as the Government seeks to establish a geo-referenced data repository

Supplying information. WFP food security assessments have become the principal analytical instruments in Central America

Innovating. WFP’s operation in the Niger is characterized by willingness to pilot innovations, for example by producing Plumpy’Sup from a Nigerien enterprise to support local production

53. WFP's increasing work on disaster risk reduction illustrates these roles. In five operations, WFP provided leadership to United Nations teams and technical advice to governments; applied advanced methodological tools to help build national responses; and used its convening power to bring actors together around the issue.
54. Agility in partnerships. WFP's agility in fluid and rapidly changing operating environments continues to be commended, with swift and flexible adaptation welcomed by government partners in nine operations. Budget revisions supported adaptation to changed caseloads, ration baskets or activities, and/or an increased focus on capacity development.

Good practice 4: Agility for relevance

National governments in Central America highly valued WFP's PRRO as an agile instrument for providing immediate relief as soon as an emergency has been declared. The flexible design allowed activities and modalities to be combined to address specific country-level priorities. The PRRO adapted to different types of emergencies and to the various political, security and environmental contexts for implementation.

55. Efficiency in partnerships. Previous syntheses found constraints to efficiency in WFP operations. However, cost-efficiency featured positively in the 2016 cohort, with six evaluations commending achievements. Improvements were attributed to cost-sharing through partnerships, the use of technologically sophisticated distribution systems, and administrative measures such as centralized disbursements and electronic payments. The role of cash-based transfers in improving efficiency was noted in four evaluations.

Good practice 5: Cost-efficiency

In Ethiopia, introduction of a biometric system increased the efficiency of food distribution and is expected to reduce fraud by 10–20 percent. WFP also incorporated measures to meet specific needs, such as adding a milling allowance and exploring the use of alternative cereals.

56. Nine operations noted operational inefficiencies including inefficient hand-over to Government in Bhutan, targeting inefficiencies in Lesotho, and duplicated responsibilities in The Gambia. In Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal, geographical and population targeting changed each year, compromising effectiveness for beneficiaries as well as efficiency.
57. The timeliness of six operations was praised in 2016. In Ethiopia, despite challenging conditions, WFP continued to deliver supplies every 30 days. In Rwanda, a monthly distribution schedule allowed beneficiaries to plan. However, under challenging funding and operational conditions, seven operations experienced pipeline breaks in 2016, coinciding with peak hunger periods in Liberia and Senegal.

Explanatory Factors

External Factors

58. External crises have consistently constrained the effectiveness of operations covered in these syntheses. For this cohort, crises included natural disasters in Central America, the Ebola outbreak in Liberia, and insecurity and violence in Afghanistan, Central America and Ukraine. Political instability and/or changes in government affected three operations.
59. WFP's trusted relationships with government continued to contribute to success in 14 operations, compared with 9 in the 2015 synthesis. Highly valued aspects included WFP's agility, flexibility and enabling roles; its willingness to innovate; and its strong field presence. In particular, its constancy of partnership, also noted in the 2015 synthesis, bought credibility with government and the sense of a committed partnership. In ten operations, implementation through national systems or budgets supported efficiency and effectiveness, as well as contributing to capacity development.

60. Most of the 15 operations in this cohort benefited from conducive policy environments, with social protection frameworks for example supporting implementation. However, as WFP shifts to more strategic partnership approaches, it has increasingly encountered policy and political challenges. These included national policy positions in relation to refugees in Ethiopia; limited access to official data or beneficiaries in Nicaragua; and lack of experience of, or hesitation in, working with international actors under emergency conditions in Central America and Ukraine.
61. National capacity limitations have consistently affected operations in all three years of these syntheses. In 2016, all 15 operations met challenges, with difficulties related to understaffing; lack of shared conceptual frameworks, such as for disaster risk reduction; weak inter-sectoral collaboration; and limited policy-making capability. Three evaluations found that WFP had overoptimistic views of national capacity, linked to the weak analysis discussed in the section on Design and Strategic Positioning.
62. As in previous years, low funding volumes constrained performance in 10 evaluations, with volumes ranging from 24 percent of requirements at the mid-point of the Niger operation, to 78 percent in Bhutan. Concerns about reliance on a narrow – single-donor – funding base were raised in Lesotho and Liberia. Lack of funding resulted in curtailed activities, pipeline breaks, and reduced geographical and beneficiary coverage and/or frequency of assistance.
63. Difficulties with short-term, unpredictable or non-aligned funding occurred in five evaluations in this cohort, compared with ten in 2015. However, the challenges presented were substantial, including lack of multi-year commitments in Côte d’Ivoire and the Niger; earmarking in Ukraine; irregular arrival of funds in Senegal; and in-kind contributions in Afghanistan.

Internal Factors

64. Effective communication with donors and governments supported partnerships, with WFP described as “conscientious” and “transparent” in its communications. However, internal communication, also raised in previous syntheses, was a barrier in four operations, with limited information flows between sub-/area and country offices and centralized decision-making.
65. Limited human resources constrained performance in five operations, compared with nine in the 2015 synthesis, particularly at the sub-office level. Constraints were related to lack of technical expertise, such as in nutrition or livelihoods. Monitoring systems were affected by lack of personnel in six operations. However, strong technical backstopping from the regional bureau – also a success factor in the 2014 and 2015 syntheses – supported six operations, although insufficiently available in Côte d’Ivoire and Sao Tome and Principe and underutilized in Liberia.
66. Finally, design flaws, consistently identified throughout this synthesis series, reoccur in 2016, with nine operations lacking robust internal logics or theories of change. This is linked to limited use of available evidence and learning from available data, as well as limited gender sensitivity in design. Targeting weaknesses, identified in seven evaluations – compared with ten in 2015 – also arose from limited analysis. This evidence gap resulted in disconnects between problem statements and responses; and overambitious designs in relation to skillsets and funding forecasts.

Conclusions

67. Evidence from this third operation evaluation synthesis finds WFP’s corporate shift from food aid to food assistance now accelerating. Partnerships are evolving; strategic positions shifting; and enabling roles increasingly deployed.
68. WFP’s evolution to an enabling partner, observed in the 2015 synthesis, is confirmed and consolidated by this cohort of operations. More strategic models of partnership have involved partner governments closely in design; ensured strong alignment with country policy frameworks; and emphasized delivery through national programmes and systems. In diverse contexts, and under difficult conditions, WFP has adroitly deployed advocacy and technical assistance roles to help build durable change.

69. Results in 2016 find work in resilience and disaster risk reduction gaining momentum, supported by the enabling roles adopted. Gender is still largely quantitatively perceived, although early transformative gains are now emerging. Attention to cost-efficiency is progressively delivering improvements, although intra-operational synergies remain weak.
70. Critically, designs in 2016 were still not consistently evidence-based, a factor raised in three successive syntheses in this series. The underlying drivers of food insecurity – including policy and political, gender and capacity factors – are still insufficiently diagnosed for firmly grounded operational responses. Logic chains linking context, needs, targeting and results are not yet fully extrapolated. Monitoring data are increasingly available, but issues with quality and information management present the next round of challenges.
71. Operations in this cohort also highlight the challenges inherent to more strategic levels of engagement. While committed alliances with government have bought WFP major credibility in countries, its partnership base remains narrowly focused, not yet embracing the collective model envisaged by the 2030 Agenda. Moreover, while increasingly part of operational practice, WFP's capacity development work has still not matured. Approaches are often ungrounded in clear diagnostics, fragmented and conceptually reduced to "training". Results, while creditable, remain piecemeal rather than systemic.
72. Finally, but critically, operations throughout the three years of these syntheses remain insufficiently geared to sustainability or hand-over. Strategies are weak, and the "end points" unclearly defined. Components are conceived as periodic interventions, whose implementation is often assumed, rather than being framed as stages of a journey whose ultimate destination – zero hunger – stands clearly in view.
73. The SDGs have raised the bar of ambition for all global actors. Amid a complex geometry of global forces, this third operation evaluation synthesis finds WFP's corporate shift helping deliver results. Trusted partnerships, swift adaptation and use of innovation are supporting strategic reorientation in countries. An enabling, rather than a purely delivery, model is helping build nationally owned food and nutrition security systems, where conditions permit.
74. WFP's comparative advantages – its agility, flexibility and willingness to innovate, alongside its resolute commitment to the people it serves – have been consistently highlighted in the three syntheses in this series. While positioning WFP well for the future, these assets and capacities require firmer harnessing to safeguard future results. The lessons that accompany this synthesis aim to support WFP as it continues to evolve.

Lessons

75. Building on those from 2014 and 2015, lessons in 2016 aim to help consolidate WFP's corporate transition in all its country offices:
 - **Lesson 1: Demand rigour in design.** Also signalled in the 2015 synthesis, the design process – far more than the resulting artefact of the programme document – is the foundation for results. As the SDGs take hold, design provides the main vehicle within the country partnership for jointly analysing context, assessing capacities and risks, considering options and confirming priorities. Rather than acting on assumptions, WFP's evolving country strategic planning process requires rigour and a forward view. Analysing the underlying drivers of food insecurity – including institutional and policy factors, conflict/fragility, capacity, gender and inequality dynamics – will help ensure evidence-based choices. Clearly mapping pathways to higher-level results while remaining firmly geared to humanitarian effectiveness concerns will place the focus on the medium term.
 - **Lesson 2: Learn from, and make use of, available evidence.** Linked to Lesson 1 on design, greater use should be made of the "evidence bank" available to WFP. Multiple assets exist, from the robust and detailed technical data so highly valued by country partners, to evaluations, reviews and other forms of learning. But data and lessons are not always sufficiently applied to ensure evidence-based and reliable designs. Supported by harmonized information management systems, they can be better leveraged for results.

- **Lesson 3: Sharpen capacity development.** As WFP transitions from “implementer to enabler”, its capacity development work requires improvement. Now signalled as a weakness in three successive syntheses, more sophisticated technical approaches are needed to meet the challenges of the future. Strategies should be based on a clear diagnostic of critical gaps; be geared to WFP’s comparative advantages; focus on the system rather than the individual; and be jointly agreed with the collective country partnership. They should also differentiate clearly between enabling environment, institutional and individual intentions. Minimum standards for design and implementation would benefit results.
- **Lesson 4: From “women” to “gender” beyond numbers:** WFP’s corporate impetus on gender is gaining momentum, with recognition – if not always sufficient treatment – of gender needs. However, as all three syntheses in this series have noted, women are not a uniform group; nor can gender needs be served by “including them” alone. Nuanced approaches are needed, based on specific analysis that sees contextual gender dynamics not as barriers to food security and nutrition, but as challenges to be overcome. Implementation should contest stereotypes in line with WFP’s international commitments.
- **Lesson 5: Walk together in partnership.** Currently, WFP’s partnership lens is trained firmly but selectively on alliances with government. While its own swift operational agility may not be matched by less fast-moving actors, partnerships under the 2030 Agenda are universal and all-embracing. Positioning WFP’s strengths and comparative advantages within the constellation of country-level actors, even if it tries patience at times, will better leverage its assets and capacities for truly transformative change. Clear accountability for partnership results will sharpen focus and intent.
- **Lesson 6: Prepare for departure:** Perhaps owing to its deep humanitarian commitment, some of the WFP operations analysed here are insufficiently geared to hand-over. But the commitment to staying under crisis conditions must be matched by the confidence to leave when the moment is right.

Operationally, clearer guidance on preparation for hand-over will reinforce to staff that preparing well for exit is as much a part of partnership as staying to deliver. More strategically, a “fit-for-purpose” and politically astute WFP, within its country strategic planning, will articulate a clear line of sight to hand-over. Linked to capacity development, exit plans should include a road map that plots the journey’s stages through clear milestones, indicators and hand-over dates. WFP’s resources and capacities should be aligned accordingly, geared to the point when, on the road to zero hunger, pathways rightly diverge.

ANNEX

MAIN FEATURES OF OPERATIONS EVALUATED														
Operation							Activities						Modalities	
Country	Category	No.	Duration	Value (USD million)	% funded to date	Target beneficiaries*	General distribution	Nutrition	School feeding	Food assistance for assets/training	Capacity development/ augmentation	Local purchase	Food	Cash-based transfers
Afghanistan	PRRO	200447	2014–2016	524 650 235	52.9	3 869 800	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Bhutan	DEV	200300	2014–2018	8 579 519	78	30 000			√		√	√	√	
Central America	PRRO	200490	2014–2016	11 750 869	50.4	2 247 291	√			√	√	√	√	√
Côte d'Ivoire	DEV	200465	2013–2016	47 753 000	27.7	571 000		◇	√		√	◇	√	◇
Egypt	CP	200238	2013–2017	165 484 294	77	1 335 000		◇	√	√	√	√	√	◇ (pilot)
Ethiopia	PRRO	200700	2015–2018	487 291 946	37.8	650 000	√	√**	√	√	√		√	√
Gambia	PRRO	200557	2013–2015	13 897 080	42.2	105 000		√		◇	√		√	√
Lesotho	CP	200369	2013–2017	40 470 716	43.3	124 000		√**	√	√	√	◇	√	√
Liberia	PRRO	200550	2013–2016	32 925 000	59	90 000	√	√	◇	◇		√	√	
Nicaragua	CP	200434	2013–2018	33 114 412	71.5	413 000		◇**	√	◇	√	√	√	
Niger	PRRO	200538	2014–2016	1 002 020 926	24	6 854 519	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Rwanda	PRRO	200744	2015–2016	60 290 000	46	193 900	√	√**	√			√	√	√
Sao Tome and Principe	DEV	200295	2012–2016	5 286 436	48.5	43 200			√		√		√	
Senegal	CP	200249	2012–2016	76 165 553	30.8	1 778 588		√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Ukraine	EMOP	200765	2014–2016	55 981 054	56	575 000	√					√	√	√
Planned							7	11	12	10	12	12	15	11

◇ Denotes planned but not implemented or implemented to a very limited degree in terms of beneficiary numbers or duration.

* Planned beneficiaries throughout the project's lifetime.

** Denotes HIV/AIDS activities that are analysed/reported under nutrition.

Acronyms Used in the Document

APR	Annual Performance Report
CP	country programme
DEV	development project
EMOP	emergency operation
OEV	Office of Evaluation
PRRO	protracted relief and recovery operation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
ZHC	Zero Hunger Challenge