Summary report on the review of the implementation of recommendations from thematic evaluations of a strategic/global nature

Executive summary

This review of the implementation of recommendations from global evaluations aims to promote the use of evaluation evidence for learning and accountability purposes and highlights areas for action where WFP can maximize the achievement of its mission. The review covered ten global evaluations published between 2016 and June 2020. It generated one report for each of the evaluations in addition to this synthesis report, which presents the overarching findings, conclusions and recommendations of the review.

The ten evaluations resulted in 65 recommendations with multiple sub-recommendations. Management agreed with 54 of the recommendations and partially agreed with the remaining 11. The review identified four reasons for partial agreement, which in most cases related to disagreement with a sub-recommendation: the recommendation contradicted WFP policies; the recommendation did not sufficiently consider financial or human resource constraints; the recommendation went too far in addressing the finding; or the recommendation did not fit the pragmatic nature of the organization.

The review team scored the actionability of management responses to the recommendations and sub-recommendations of each evaluation using a weighted scoring system. The responses to five of the ten evaluations met or surpassed the criteria of being fully actionable based on an assessment of the specificity, measurability, assignability and time boundness of the actions agreed in the management response.

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

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In the WFP risk and recommendations tracking system, known as R2, there were 156 actions that corresponded to the agreed actions in the management responses to the ten evaluations. Among these, 99 were marked as "implemented". In interviews conducted by the review team, 61 of these were confirmed to have been fully implemented and 23 partially implemented. The remaining 15 either had not been implemented or were no longer relevant or could not be assessed with regard to the status of their implementation.

All focal points responsible for the implementation of the agreed actions and their line managers stated that the evaluation findings and recommendations, and to a lesser extent the management response, were very useful for guiding their actions and for obtaining Executive Board endorsement of actions already taken.

Through interviews the review team identified factors that facilitated the implementation of recommendations, including the availability of flexible funds, focused leadership in thematic areas, commitment and collaboration across functional units and the quality of the evaluations. Factors that hindered implementation included earmarked and short-term funding, limited donor appetite for funding human resource costs, and limited communication of corporate prioritization and allocation decisions. Respondents also noted that some recommendations for financial and human resource allocations had been formulated from a thematic perspective without considering competing priorities and without a full understanding of the financial environment in which WFP operates. Completion timelines for the implementation of actions agreed by management were frequently not met, often because little consideration was given to interdependencies by which the implementation of certain recommendations required that other matters be addressed as well, for instance when the same completion deadline was set for a series of actions that by necessity required sequential implementation.

Two relevant strategic themes arising from the review are funding and human resources, which are the subjects of the evaluation of the funding of WFP's work and the evaluation of the WFP people strategy for 2014–2017. While some actions remain outstanding, the review could not clearly identify whether the evaluations had led to action on some of the more systemic underlying issues raised. Funding actions yet to be implemented relate to the consolidated planning of development work, ongoing capacity building to improve services related to funding, timely and transparent internal resource allocation decisions and an advance financing mechanism for operational sustainability. Most outstanding or incomplete human resource actions refer to strengthening human resource capacity in specific technical areas by increasing staffing, creating more permanent staff positions and offering more training programmes. These are being addressed. However, decisions about staffing levels and contract modalities cannot be guided by technical needs alone but must also reflect the level and structure of funding for headquarters, regional bureaux and country offices; meanwhile, training programmes are ongoing activities that require continuous revision as new lessons are learned and new staff members are recruited.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the summary report on the review of the implementation of recommendations from thematic evaluations of a strategic/global nature (WFP/EB.A/2022/7-D) and management's response (WFP/EB.A/2022/7-D/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations set out in the report, taking into account the considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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* 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.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1. The use of evaluations is high on the agenda of WFP's evaluation function, prompting the commissioning of this review of the implementation of recommendations from global evaluations. The review covers global evaluations that were published between 2016 and 30 June 2020.

2. In 2016 the Executive Board approved the WFP evaluation policy for 2016–2021,[1] which is based on norms, standards and guidance issued by the United Nations Evaluation Group. All evaluations are subject to WFP's evaluation quality assurance system and to independent post hoc quality assessment. Based on the evaluation quality assurance system, the formulation of recommendations for centralized evaluations is guided by a technical note[2] issued by the Office of Evaluation (OEV).

3. The Corporate Planning and Performance Division coordinates the compilation and finalization of the management response matrix for centralized evaluations.[3] The Corporate Planning and Performance Division reports to the Executive Board on management's follow-up to centralized and decentralized evaluation recommendations and, for centralized evaluations, is responsible for tracking actions and responses in order to determine their implementation status. The process for responding to evaluation recommendations, including roles and responsibilities, has recently been revised in WFP's risk and recommendation tracking tool, R2, which was launched in January 2021. The Corporate Planning and Performance Division has also revamped its annual report to the Board on recommendation follow-up and created a dashboard that allows all staff to obtain live updates on the status of implementation of any evaluation recommendation.

1.2 Objectives and scope

4. In accordance with its terms of reference, this review aims to promote the use of evaluation evidence for learning and accountability purposes throughout WFP and to highlight areas where further action is recommended in order to maximize WFP's achievement of its mission. It is also expected to serve as a learning instrument for OEV that could help improve the formulation of evaluation recommendations.

5. Seven policy evaluations and three strategy evaluations were included in the review.

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[1] "Evaluation Policy (2016−2021)" (WFP/EB.2/2015/4-A/Rev.1).

[2] WFP Office of Evaluation. 2020. *Technical Note: Quality of Evaluation Recommendations*.

[3] WFP. 2018. *Standard operating procedures for management responses to centralized evaluations*.

TABLE 1: EVALUATIONS INCLUDED IN THE REVIEW		
#	Category	Title and year of the evaluation report
1.	Strategic	*Strategic Evaluation of Funding WFP's Work*, 2020
2.	Policy	*Evaluation of the Gender Policy (2015–2020)*, 2020
3.	Policy	*Evaluation of the WFP People Strategy (2014–2017)*, 2020
4.	Policy	*Evaluation of the Update of WFP's Safety Nets Policy*, 2019
5.	Strategic	*Strategic Evaluation of WFP Support for Enhanced Resilience*, 2019
6.	Strategic	*Strategic Evaluation of the Pilot Country Strategic Plans*, 2018
7.	Policy	*Evaluation of the WFP Humanitarian Protection Policy*, 2018
8.	Policy	*Evaluation of WFP Policies on Humanitarian Principles and Access in Humanitarian Contexts*, 2018
9.	Policy	*Policy Evaluation: WFP Corporate Partnership Strategy (2014–2017)*, 2017
10.	Policy	*Policy Evaluation: WFP Policy on Capacity Development: An Update on Implementation (2009)*, 2017

6. The main outputs of the review are ten individual reports on the recommendations and management responses of each of the evaluations in addition to this synthesis report, which analyses the findings and lessons generated by each of the ten reviews. It is intended to strengthen accountability to the Executive Board by highlighting areas of strategic importance where there are gaps in the implementation of recommendations. It also offers feedback that can be used to improve the guidance provided to evaluation teams about the formulation of recommendations based on the experience emerging from global evaluations over the past five years.

1.3 Methodology and limitations

7. The findings are based on a systematic content analysis of internal documents and the transcripts of key informant interviews with WFP managers and staff responsible for the implementation of actions agreed in response to recommendations. This primarily qualitative methodology was augmented with semi-quantitative methods such as the scoring of the actionability of agreed actions in management responses and the tabulation of progress made in implementing agreed actions.

8. The main limitation of this methodology is the exclusive use of internal data. Information about implementation progress, for instance, was only collected in interviews and R2 action updates from stakeholders who were themselves responsible for implementation. The inherent bias in this approach could not be avoided. It was, to some extent, mitigated by the collection of documented evidence of progress such as strategies, frameworks and guidelines that had been developed.

9. Some of the results reported by focal points could be validated through interviews with senior management staff covering the thematic areas of most evaluations; written feedback on the draft report on each evaluation review from WFP management and OEV evaluation managers provided additional validation. The draft synthesis report was also presented and discussed at a stakeholder workshop.

2.   Synthesis findings

2.1   Level of agreement with the evaluation recommendations and relevance of planned actions for addressing them

2.1.1 Agreement with recommendations

> **Key findings**
>
> F1 – Management agreed or partially agreed with all 65 recommendations of the ten evaluations. The high level of agreement is due to high levels of staff engagement during formulation, OEV's close involvement in that process and a perception among staff, based on experience with audits, that disagreeing with a recommendation can involve complex processes.
>
> F2 – The reasons that there was only partial agreement with 11 recommendations of six evaluations were that the recommendations did not match WFP's policies or pragmatic nature; did not consider financial or human resource constraints; or went beyond the action needed to address the acknowledged findings.

10.   Management agreed with the 65 recommendations resulting from the 10 evaluations but only partially agreed with 11 recommendations in six evaluations. In three of these evaluations [4] partial agreement was indicated at the level of main recommendations and only the narrative response provided information about which part of the recommendation, or which sub-recommendation, management disagreed with. In the remaining three,[5] agreement or partial agreement was signalled in bulleted responses to sub-recommendations, although in these cases partial agreement with a sub-recommendation could also mean a *de facto* disagreement.

TABLE 2: LEVEL OF MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT WITH EVALUATION RECOMMENDATIONS			
Evaluation of …	**Recommendations**		
	Total	**Agreed**	**Partially**
Policy on capacity development (2017)	6	3	3
Corporate partnership strategy (2017)	6	4	2
Policies on humanitarian principles and access (2018)	8	5	3
Humanitarian protection policy (2018)	6	5	1
Pilot country strategic plans (2018)	5	4	1
Support for enhanced resilience (2019)	7	6	1
Safety nets policy (2019)	5	5	0
People strategy (2014–2017) (2020)	6	6	0
Gender policy (2020)	8	8	0
Funding of WFP's work (2020)	8	8	0
Total	**65**	**54**	**11**

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[4] On partnerships, the humanitarian principles and humanitarian protection policy.

[5] On capacity development, pilot country strategic plans and resilience.

11. In interviews with senior managers, the high level of management agreement with recommendations – which amounted to 83 percent of all recommendations and most sub-recommendations of the remaining 17 percent – was explained by three factors: WFP staff and evaluation teams were engaged in consultations during the evaluations and the formulation of recommendations; the process of formulating the recommendations was closely managed by OEV, possibly too closely; and managers might have been reluctant to disagreement explicitly because of experience with the complex processes that are triggered by disagreement with audit findings.

12. The sub-recommendations to which management only partially agreed, or in some cases *de facto* disagreed, were in all cases recommendations that involved actions with implications for timing, funding or other practical aspects of implementation, as opposed to strategic approach. Thus, they were not fully agreed to because of the following:

   i) **The recommended action contradicted WFP policies**. For example, the evaluation of WFP's policies on humanitarian principles and access recommended that WFP should rely more strongly on its own transport assets in environments where there are risks of non-compliance with humanitarian principles. Management responded that WFP pursued a policy of relying on the local economy and capacity for its transport operations.

   ii) **The recommended action did not sufficiently consider financial and human resource constraints.** For example, the evaluation of the policy on capacity development recommended the designation of a focal point for capacity strengthening for each country office and regional bureau. Management replied that efforts to enhance the capacity strengthening function in country offices and regional bureaux needed to take resourcing levels and current portfolios into account. Another example concerns the recommendation that partnership action plans be made mandatory components of country strategic plans (CSPs). While management embraced partnerships, it wanted to avoid a top-down approach that risked overburdening regional and country offices.

   iii) **The recommendation went too far in addressing an acknowledged finding.** For example, the evaluation of the humanitarian protection policy recommended a revision of the information management system in order to strengthen WFP's analysis of contexts and protection issues. Management agreed that the analysis required improvement but argued that this could be achieved by strengthening current systems rather than revising them.

   iv) **The recommendation did not match the pragmatic nature of the organization.** For example, the evaluation of the corporate partnership strategy recommended that management revise existing partnership agreements. Management argued that this was not needed because it was preferable to formalize partnerships on an as-needed basis in order to remain flexible and cost-efficient.

2.1.2 *Management response: relevance and actionability*

Key findings

F3 – The actionability of the management response actions, including their relevance, measurability, assignability and time boundness, varied among evaluations. According to the scoring system applied by this review, the management responses for five of the ten evaluations met the full criteria for actionability. Management responses most frequently scored low when instead of defining an action they described current WFP practice or did not fully address the recommendation.

13. This section assesses the extent to which WFP management adequately addresses the recommendations and the extent to which a management response can be considered actionable. Most evaluations formulated detailed actionable recommendations supported with evidence-based findings. Implementers considered them useful and followed them in planning, prioritizing and developing responsive actions. However, this relevance and actionability was sometimes lost in the agreed actions of the management response, which therefore did not contribute much to guiding implementation.

14. The relevance of a management response denotes the extent to which it addresses or is aligned with the recommendation. For example, the review team asked whether all elements of the recommendation were included in the management response and, if not, whether the response explained any omission. Relevance is reflected in the parameter "specificity" in the actionability score (see below). Some management responses addressed recommendations without defining actions, while others defined actions that did not fully or directly address the recommendations. In some cases, the responses raised the question of whether management actually agreed with the recommendations.

15. Several action statements in management responses were descriptions of what WFP was doing or had already done to address issues raised in the recommendation rather than agreements on actions to be taken. While useful for clarification, they did not constitute actionable responses. They were, nevertheless, entered into the R2 tracking system so that their implementation could be monitored.

16. Each of the 135 pairs of recommendations and responsive actions was independently reviewed by two team members and scored for the actionability of the response according to four weighted criteria:[6]

    i) Specificity: Does the response define actions that adequately address the recommendation? (weight: 50 percent)

    ii) Measurability: Can the results of the actions be verified? (weight: 15 percent)

    iii) Assignability: Is the responsibility for implementing the actions clearly assigned? (weight: 25 percent)

    iv) Time boundness: Do actions have a clear timeline for implementation? (weight: 10 percent)

17. A maximum score of 4 was assigned if the response surpassed the criterion and a score of 3 if it fully met the criterion. The weighted averages achieved by each action statement were averaged across all management responses of each evaluation and converted into percentages whereby an average of 3 (75 percent of the maximum score) indicated that management had responded to the evaluation with responses that were, on average, fully actionable. Higher scores indicated that the responses surpassed expectations.

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[6] Because the assessment was based on Executive Board documents, the total number of actions identified was not identical to the number of actions listed in the R2 tracking system.

TABLE 3: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE ACTIONABILITY SCORES		
Evaluation	**Number of actions scored**	**Mean actionability score**
Corporate partnership strategy (2017)	4	84%
Safety nets policy (2019)	5	96%
Humanitarian protection policy (2018)	5	79%
Funding of WFP's work (2020)	26	76%
Gender policy (2020)	30	76%
Pilot country strategic plans (2018)	26	70%
Support for enhanced resilience (2019)	21	63%
People strategy (2014–2017) (2020)	6	63%
Policies on humanitarian principles and access (2018)	6	61%
Policy on capacity development (2017)	6	59%
Average of averages		**72%**

18. According to this scoring system, the management responses for five evaluations met or surpassed the full criteria for actionability. Overall, the management responses to the recommendations of the ten evaluations grouped around the target score for actionability of 75 percent (mean score of 3) and were moderately skewed towards those that did not quite reach it.

Figure 1: Distribution of average management response actionability scores by evaluation around 75 percent target
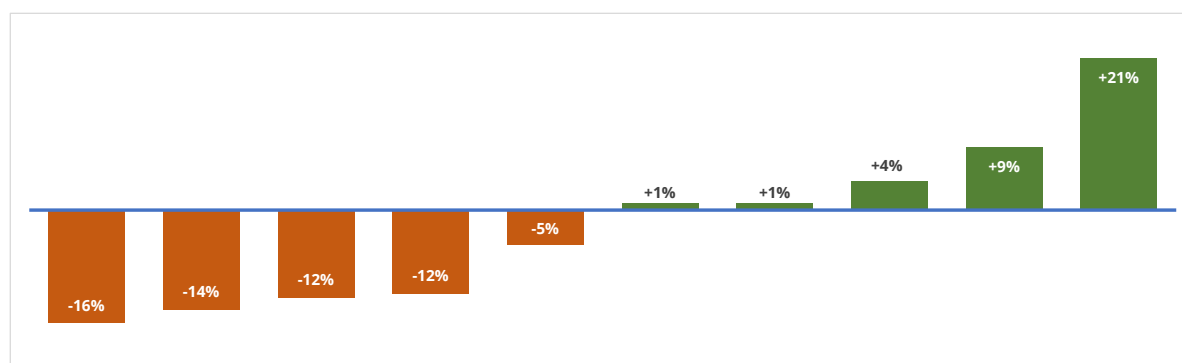
19. Management response statements most frequently scored low in terms of actionability when, rather than defining an action, they described current WFP practice. Some management response statements scored low on actionability because they were themselves formulated as recommendations and not as actions.

2.2   Level of implementation of recommendations, results and perceived utility

> **Key findings**
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> F4 – Among actions that had been closed in R2, full implementation could not be confirmed for about one third although progress and partial implementation was noted for most. The level of implementation of recently formulated actions was low.
>
> F5 – All interviewed implementation focal points confirmed that the findings and recommendations of the evaluations were useful in guiding their work or making it more visible within WFP. Several stated that they used the recommendations rather than the management responses to guide their actions.
>
> F6 – The methodology of the assessment could not generate objectively verifiable findings of the results achieved because the primary source of data was the information provided by those who were in charge of implementing the actions.

2.2.1 Progress on actions

20.   The review team examined progress in the implementation of 156 actions listed in R2. This is not the same as assessing the level of implementation of recommendations because some management responses did not fully agree with or fully address the recommendation (see section 2.1). Among the 156 actions in R2, 99 (63 percent) were marked as "implemented" and 57 were classed as "ongoing" or "open".

  ➢   Only 61 of the 99 actions marked as implemented in R2 were confirmed in interviews as having been fully implemented; 23 of them were described as partially implemented.

  ➢   Among the 57 actions marked as ongoing or open in R2, 45 (79 percent) were actions formulated in response to the four most recent evaluations, which were published in 2019 and 2020.[7]

21.   Progress on actions, as assessed by the review team, is presented in table 4.

TABLE 4: PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION AGAINST R2 STATUS REPORTS										
	Funding	Humanitarian principles	Humanitarian protection	People strategy	Pilot CSPs	Partnership strategy	Gender	Capacity development	Safety nets	Resilience	Total
Action implemented (R2)	12	20	6	2	33	6	0	6	1	13	99
Implemented	8	8	2	1	24	4		4	1	9	61
Partially implemented*	4	5	4	1	3	1		2		3	23
Ongoing action*		3			2						5
Not implemented					2	1					3
No longer relevant					2						2
Could not be assessed		4								1	5

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[7] On gender, funding, the people strategy and safety nets.

TABLE 4: PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION AGAINST R2 STATUS REPORTS	Funding	Humanitarian principles	Humanitarian protection	People strategy	Pilot CSPs	Partnership strategy	Gender	Capacity development	Safety nets	Resilience	Total
Action open or ongoing (R2)	13	5	0	7	1	0	21	0	4	6	57
Ongoing/progress noted	13	3		2	1		1				20
Implemented		1		2			4			4	11
Partially implemented				2			8		4	1	15
Not implemented/ not started				1			6			1	8
Could not be assessed		1					2				3
Total actions	25	25	6	9	34	6	21	6	5	19	156

* Partially implemented actions are those for which completion can be clearly defined (e.g. the adoption of a new policy) but which have not yet been completed. Ongoing actions relate to processes that are implemented over a long period of time (e.g., the alignment of CSPs with United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework cycles) and that are in the process of being implemented but for which it is not possible to specify a date of completion.

22. It is not entirely clear why almost one third of actions marked as closed in R2 (version of March 2021) had not been fully implemented by November 2021.[8] In interviews, two main reasons were given for the failure to complete actions within the timeframe and the ending of implementation monitoring, including prematurely:

➢ The action described an ongoing management process rather than a distinct action. This may primarily be an issue of how the action was formulated.

➢ The recommendations and the agreed actions in the management responses were not properly sequenced. Some actions could only be initiated after others were completed.

23. Progress related to some recommendations could not be assessed in interviews with stakeholders because the management responses were not sufficiently actionable.

2.2.2 Results and perceived utility

24. Overall, the stakeholders who were leading management response implementation stated that the findings and recommendations, and to a lesser extent the management responses themselves, were very useful either for guiding their actions – for instance in the development of new policies – or for generating Board support for actions that were already being taken. Examples cited were the evaluations of WFP's safety nets policy and the pilot CSPs, where programming had already advanced beyond the recommended actions but the evaluation findings and recommendations nonetheless provided assurance that the implementation of the Integrated Road Map was on the right course.

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[8] In its comments on the draft summary evaluation report, the Corporate Planning and Performance Division noted that the accuracy of implementation data should improve thanks to the introduction of the R2 system, clearer management accountabilities for action approval and more detailed guidance, including on various closure statuses.

25. Most stakeholders of other units or departments who were named as responsible for implementing associated actions – for instance fundraising, training or recruiting staff to support the implementation of a thematic recommendation – had little recollection of recommendations and were less likely to consider them useful. In part this was also explained by staff mobility: many of those interviewed had taken up their posts after the relevant evaluations were published and the management responses formulated.

26. Several respondents described the perceived results of implementing the recommendations. They included making WFP programmes more people centred and more firmly grounded in humanitarian principles; the increased mainstreaming of partnership principles; and the diversification of funding through organizational change. Results reported by those in charge of implementing actions are, however, not sufficient evidence for a robust assessment; assessing the results of the actions taken is therefore largely beyond the scope of this assessment.

2.3 Factors that enable or hinder the implementation of evaluation recommendations

Key findings

F7 – Factors that enabled the implementation of recommendations include the overall flexibility of WFP, focused leadership on specific themes and commitment and collaboration across organizational entities. In addition, the quality of evaluations and recommendations that reinforce policies and ongoing processes help push activities forward.

F8 – Factors that hinder the implementation of recommendations are in large part related to human and financial resource constraints. These include limited availability of funds as a result of earmarking, short-term contributions and low donor appetite for funding staffing costs; and a lack of transparency and communication related to corporate prioritization and allocation decisions.

F9 – Recommendations from thematic evaluations on staffing, funding and other themes can be multiple and compartmentalized, lacking the necessary corporate perspective that takes into account competing priorities, the larger strategic and programmatic context and the financing model of the organization. This hinders implementation because it results in recommendations not being implemented to the extent indicated in management responses.

F10 – Also observed as factors hindering the implementation of recommendations are changes in roles, responsibilities and action ownership, including a lack of clarity therein, in relation to the need for better integration, coordination, workforce planning and accountability for the implementation of overarching programmes that span departments and divisions.

F11 – Country and regional level follow-up remain challenging when country offices and regional bureaux do not feel that they own the actions promised in management responses and are not involved in the formulation of recommendations and management responses, as noted in two of the reviews conducted.

F12 – Implementation of evaluation recommendations is sometimes affected by the understanding and interpretation of the recommendations by management, the response process and a lack of ownership of management responses.

F13 – Implementation can also be hindered by insufficient attention to critical pathways of actions.

27. The list of enabling and hindering factors is not exhaustive, and there may be other specific and unique reasons for the failure to fully implement an action promised in a management response.

Figure 2: Common enabling and hindering factors
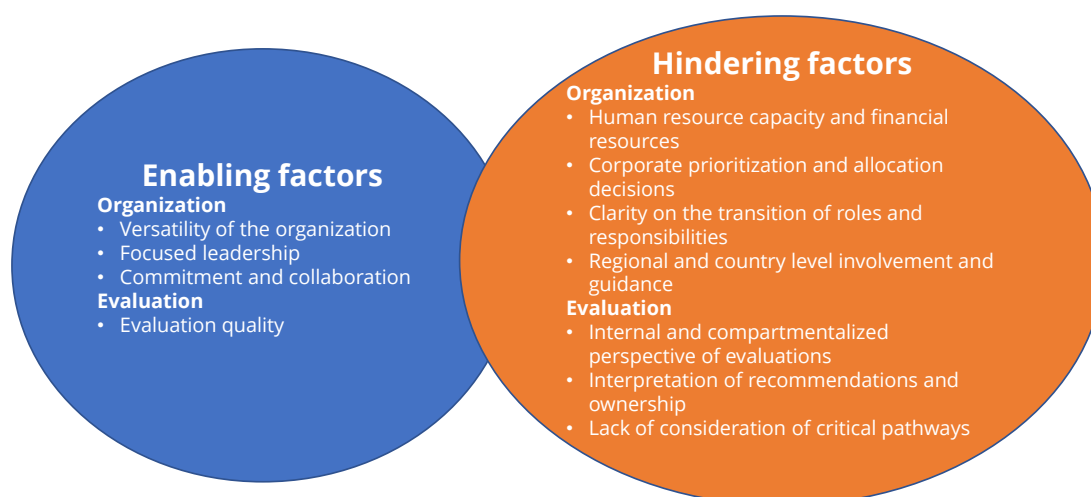
2.3.1 Common enabling factors

28. **Versatility of the organization:** The flexibility and versatility of WFP and the voluntary nature of its funding motivate staff. The organization's agile approach in emergency responses "seeps through everything else we do" and creates a "can do" mentality.

29. **Leadership:** The importance of focused leadership in the implementation of evaluation recommendations was underlined by several informants, particularly in the context of two of the reviewed evaluations.[9] Although the importance of partnerships has been clear for more than a decade, interviewees valued efforts to anchor the partnership function within the organization and mainstream a partnership mindset, describing the recommendations as useful strategic guides for implementation. Other informants highlighted the recommendation to invest in the bottom up strategic budgeting exercise, which has resulted in better transparency and accountability for WFP in its resource allocation.

30. The **commitment and collaboration** of departments, divisions and units either directly or through overarching committees or working groups have facilitated implementation. Examples include the collaboration between the Programme Cycle Management Unit and the Gender Office on the mainstreaming of gender in CSP guidance; the cooperation between functional areas facilitated by the interdivisional steering committee on resilience and the team dedicated to implementing the related recommendations; and the development of the WFP strategy on support for social protection, which was possible thanks to strong commitment by the Social Protection Unit, high-level interest from various parts of WFP and strong demand from regional bureaux for an operational strategy.

31. **Evaluation quality and reinforcement of recommendations:** The quality and credibility of the evaluation team are enabling factors for good management responses and their effective follow-up. The evaluation function's approach to stakeholder involvement and interaction with the evaluation manager during the formulation of recommendations contributed to ownership of the recommendations and their follow-up.

2.3.2 Common hindering factors

32. **Human resource capacity and financial resource limitations** are the main factors constraining the implementation of recommendations. Management describes the limited availability of funding, which is also often earmarked and short term, and limited donor

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[9] Evaluations on the corporate partnership strategy and the funding of WFP's work.

appetite for funding staffing costs as having an impact on the implementation of recommendations by limiting the deployment of the necessary workforce or the allocation of funds needed for non-emergency programmes.

33. **Corporate prioritization and internal competition for allocations:** Given WFP's funding model, all activities would ideally be included in a prioritization process to increase transparency and improve performance monitoring and accountability. However, the prioritization procedures in place have tended to result in unpredictable and confusing resource allocations for units and divisions. The bottom up strategic budgeting exercise is currently being tested as a tool for strengthening the prioritization process and increasing transparency and is expected to address some of these challenges.[10]

34. **Internal and compartmentalized perspective of evaluations:** Thematic evaluations often have an inward focus and generate recommendations that are not sufficiently oriented towards WFP's corporate strategy and its many competing priorities; as a result they are sometimes not implemented to the level initially agreed upon. This applies to recommendations related to staff capacity and staffing levels and to competing funding priorities and the overall structure of available funds. For example, WFP has been working on funding diversification for more than ten years but is only now starting to achieve traction because more attention is being directed outwards, with WFP analysing the policies and priorities of individual donors and targeting its fundraising efforts accordingly.

35. **Lack of clarity on changes in roles and responsibilities:** Changes in roles and responsibilities are natural in a dynamic organization but a lack of clarity in this area has affected the implementation of recommendations and actions. The review noted that changes in the ownership of actions and a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities for cross-cutting programmatic implementation across departments and divisions need to be addressed by strengthening integration, coordination, workforce planning and accountability. For example, cross-functional coordination and coherence were noted as a challenge in the implementation of recommendations from the evaluations on humanitarian protection, gender and the humanitarian principles.[11]

36. **Regional and country-level involvement and guidance:** The increased focus in recent years on delivering results in-country[12] calls for optimal guidance and participation at the country and regional levels. The reviews of the evaluations on resilience and safety nets uncovered good examples of regional and country-level involvement. However, follow-up remains a challenge when country offices and regional bureaux do not take ownership of the implementation of recommendations and when current staff were not involved in the formulation of recommendations and management responses. In addition, limited capacity at the country level to analyse gender issues also affects the commitment to increased gender-sensitive programming.

37. **Interpretation of recommendations:** The formulation of recommendations differed among the 10 reviewed evaluations and can influence the formulation of a management response and its implementation:

➢ The number of recommendations in each evaluation varied between six and nine, all of them strategic. Several of the evaluations broke these recommendations down into sub- and sub-sub-recommendations, many of them highly operational such as a

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[10] "WFP management plan (2022–2024)" (WFP/EB.2/2021/5-A/1/Rev.1).

[11] Other examples relate to discrepancies between the assignment of responsibility for action in a management response and R2 and the person actually responsible for implementation.

[12] See Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network. 2019. *World Food Programme (WFP) 2017–18 Performance Assessment.*

> recommendation to "keep staff workloads within acceptable limits" presented in the evaluation of the pilot CSPs.

> ➤ In some cases, management only responded to the high-level strategic recommendations; in others, management responded to each sub-sub-recommendation with a commitment to a distinct action for each.

> ➤ It is not always clear whether operational sub-recommendations are primarily illustrative of the strategic recommendation or whether they are themselves recommendations of actions to be taken; this causes confusion when it comes to implementation.

> ➤ In several instances, units were given the responsibility for implementing an action that was beyond their remit.

38. **Ownership of the management response:** The review of some evaluations indicated a lack of ownership of the commitments by management in response to recommendations as a hindering factor; this was not seen among the focal points in the unit leading the evaluations but among action owners in units that had no direct technical involvement in the thematic areas of the evaluations. There was apparently very wide engagement in discussions of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of evaluations; however, less time was given to formulating the management response in a participatory manner and with the involvement of future action owners. In addition, in some cases the managers and technical staff who had participated in consultative workshops had changed roles and the interviewed stakeholders had little recollection of any commitments to action made by their functional unit.

39. **Consideration of interdependencies:** Finally, an issue that hindered the timely implementation of agreed actions in response to several evaluations was insufficient attention to interdependent actions that could only be implemented after other actions had been completed and that therefore required later deadlines. The review identified deadlines for actions in various management responses that were unrealistic in this respect.

2.4   Key themes of strategic relevance that require further action

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Key findings

F14 – The 65 recommendations of the 10 evaluations addressed 18 cross-cutting themes of strategic importance. The themes most frequently addressed were funding and human resources. As some actions remain outstanding under these themes, the review cannot draw conclusions about the actions taken with regard to some of the more systemic issues raised by the evaluations.

F15 – Many of the financial issues raised in 11 recommendations in 6 evaluations have been systematically covered by the evaluation of the funding of WFP's work. Outstanding issues relate to consolidated planning on development work, ongoing capacity building to improve services related to funding, timely and transparent internal resource allocation decisions, and efforts to mainstream the advance financing mechanisms so that they more systematically facilitate WFP operations.

F16 – The human resource issues raised by ten recommendations in seven evaluations should largely be addressed with the adoption of the WFP people policy and the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025 in 2021. Inclusivity, gender equity and diversity are prominent aspects of the people policy. Recommended actions to strengthen staff skills and capacities are being implemented, as are workforce planning activities including reviews of contract modalities for technical staff. The people policy and the strategic plan are recent documents and implementation of actions that depend on them is still ongoing.

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40. To identify issues of strategic importance that are raised repeatedly in evaluations, the review team analysed the 65 recommendations made by the 10 evaluations and coded them according to the main theme they addressed using the compendium of 104 themes published by OEV.[13] In total, 18 themes were identified, 7 of them more than twice.

TABLE 5: MOST FREQUENTLY ADDRESSED CROSS-CUTTING THEMES IN RECOMMENDATIONS	
Cross-cutting themes	# Recommendations
Funding	11
Human resources	10
Performance management/monitoring	8
Partnerships	7
CSPs and interim CSPs	6
Gender	3
Capacity strengthening	3

41. Funding and human resources are the two cross-cutting themes most frequently addressed, followed by performance management/monitoring and partnerships. Funding and human resources account for 13 of 29 actions that require further action for full implementation and merit additional analysis to better understand the progress being made and the nature of any ongoing challenges. All but 3 of the 15 recommendations addressing the themes of performance management/monitoring and partnerships have been implemented.[14] The remaining 13 uncompleted actions addressing 10 distinct themes fell into one of three categories: actions defined in response to very recent evaluations; ongoing actions for which completion points cannot be readily identified; and actions awaiting other policy or strategy decisions before implementation can start.

2.4.1 Funding

42. Besides the evaluation of the funding of WFP's work, five other evaluations formulated recommendations related to funding. While the evaluation of the pilot CSPs made a general recommendation to address constraints to more flexible and predictable funding, the other evaluations recommended increased fundraising efforts or the allocation of additional resources to the areas of work evaluated. These issues were systematically addressed and succinctly described in the report on the evaluation of the funding of WFP's work.

43. The evaluation of the funding of WFP's work concluded that WFP had succeeded in mobilizing resources but had not addressed disparities in what was funded. It recommended that WFP maintain and increase funding by ensuring that it speaks and acts with one voice regarding its mandate and priorities (recommendation 1); strengthen efforts to finance development work (recommendation 2); fully implement the private sector strategy (recommendation 3); and redouble efforts to ensure that the aims of the Integrated Road Map are achieved in full (recommendation 6). Increased investment in resource mobilization and communication functions and in organizational capacities are advised (recommendation 5), as well as improvements in resource allocation processes (recommendation 7) and advance financing mechanisms (recommendation 8).

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[13] WFP Office of Evaluation. 2020. *Technical Note: Quality of Evaluation Recommendations*.

[14] For partnerships: not all partnership agreements with external partners have been revised yet. For performance management/monitoring: one action was awaiting the approval of the revised corporate results framework and another the completion of OEV guidelines on incorporating gender in CSP evaluations.

44. WFP has taken action in these areas. However, this review concludes that some actions remain ongoing as described below and notes that it is premature to reach conclusions on the action taken in respect of some of the more systemic issues highlighted by the evaluation.

  ➤ *Recommendation 2* – Activities that strengthen the foundation for financing WFP's work in changing lives, including tailored development offers, engagement notes and investment in WFP's organizational capacity, have been set in motion but cannot be considered fully implemented yet. A consolidated plan for strengthening the foundation for financing WFP's work in changing lives has not yet been formulated but the building blocks are being put together. It is expected that a "Transformation Fund" will be presented to the Executive Board in 2022.

  ➤ *Recommendation 5* – Organizational capacity building to improve services related to funding is ongoing. There is a growing capacity to build a stronger cadre of experts within the organization for developing new partnerships, tapping into dedicated resources on themes such as gender and resilience, mobilizing resources for recruitment and strategic workforce planning for national and specialized staff, and gaining access to new funding sources at scale.

  ➤ *Recommendation 6* – The extent to which funding has followed the shift in WFP's ambitions and the improved transparency introduced by the Integrated Road Map is difficult for this review to establish. There seem still to be differing internal and external views on the funding priorities for large-scale emergencies and WFP's other work. The review cannot establish whether efforts have led to more oversight, leadership or clarity on relative priorities that have the effect of maximizing the effectiveness of fundraising efforts, including by minimizing the risk of WFP competing against itself for the same funding sources.

  ➤ *Recommendation 7* – Given the emphasis on flexible and predictable funding for the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, there is a continued need to link resources to results and invest in evidence generation. Internal resource allocation decisions need to be timelier and more transparent. This is the intention behind the bottom up strategic budgeting exercise, but it will take time and further organizational commitment to ensure that WFP is accountable and transparent in prioritizing resource allocations and monitoring performance.

  ➤ *Recommendation 8* – In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP used its advance financing mechanisms and a newly created COVID-19 trust fund and special account to accelerate country and corporate-level responses and balance gaps in the coverage and sequencing of funding that result from a heavily earmarked and voluntary funding base. WFP is already reflecting on how its financing systems and processes can better address a future global emergency.[15]

2.4.2 Human resources

45. The evaluation of the WFP people strategy for 2014–2017 documented progress in all four of its "strategic imperatives", which covered performance management; the strengthening of staff knowledge and competence; improved opportunities and career pathways for national staff; and stronger accountability, leadership and management skills of senior leaders. The evaluation nevertheless identified gaps such as the blindness of the strategy regarding gender and diversity and documented widespread staff perceptions of inequities and a lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion. It formulated six recommendations covering issues such as organizational change management, the

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[15] WFP Office of Evaluation. 2022. *Evaluation of the WFP Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

strengthening of supervisor accountability and improved communication on human resource issues.

46.   Three recommendations directly address the context, situation and management of WFP staff. They are summarized in table 6, together with an assessment of their implementation.

TABLE 6: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEOPLE STRATEGY EVALUATION THAT DIRECTLY ADDRESS HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT	
Recommendation	**Status of implementation**
1: Develop a new policy focusing on people, including: workplace culture; gender equality, diversity and inclusion; balanced and flexible contract modalities; and performance management.	A new people policy was adopted responding to all elements of the recommendation.
3: Revise the human resources functional strategy, focusing on the role of the Human Resources Division including the tasks, capabilities and motivation of human resources staff.	A new human resources strategy has been developed.
5: Review existing contract modalities, including systematic workforce planning at all levels of the organization.	Organizational reviews of country offices were completed and more than 1,200 new fixed-term and national officer positions were created. A new staffing framework was adopted. Workforce planning has been completed at the global level, is well advanced at the functional level and is being rolled out at the country office level.

47.   Recommendation 3 is directed at WFP's human resources function, while recommendations 1 and 5 address issues that directly affect staff at all levels of the organization.

48.   Human resource concerns are also reflected in seven recommendations in six other evaluations. Six of these recommendations advocate strengthening the human resources available for the area of work that was evaluated, for example through workforce planning, the creation of new specialized staff positions, the establishment of a roster, the development or updating of job profiles, a focus on matching contract types with needs and capacity building for existing staff. The seventh recommendation calls for the integration of gender diversity and inclusiveness in the new human resources accountability framework. All actions in response to the seven recommendations are ongoing or have been partially implemented.

49.   Overall, significant attention is given to human resources in the new people policy approved in June 2021 and in the strategic plan for 2022–2025 approved in November 2021. However, the translation of the policy and the strategic plan into confirmed human resource practice across the organization will take time, and some actions in response to the recommendations therefore cannot yet be considered fully addressed and closed.

50.   The recommendations on gender, diversity and inclusiveness were taken up in the new people policy and the commitment to an inclusive workplace was reaffirmed in the new strategic plan. However, inclusiveness, diversity and gender equity in the WFP workforce require ongoing monitoring through the key performance indicators in the people policy's monitoring and reporting plan, and the development of a gender-responsive accountability framework is still ongoing. Other recommendations related to human resources tend to address the technical or operational capacity of the WFP functions that are the subject of

each evaluation. Some call for the deployment of more staff in the technical fields of focus; several suggest changes in contracting modalities, terms of reference or strengthened performance monitoring; and all recommend additional training and capacity strengthening. These issues are reflected in a generic way in the three cited recommendations of the people strategy evaluation. Key issues for ongoing attention are highlighted below.

51. Strengthening the technical capacity of staff is listed as one of three enablers of the people policy's theory of change. Aligning the workforce, skills and competencies with WFP's organizational needs is one of the core commitments made in the policy. The policy also clearly defines the areas of responsibility for cross-cutting capacity issues addressed by the Workplace Culture Department, technical capacity covered by functional divisions in their areas and field-level capacity provided by country and regional offices. In all functional areas covered by the reviewed evaluations, recommended activities for capacity strengthening have begun and the reviews of the recommendations of the ten evaluations indicate that these actions are largely on track; however, because of their open-ended nature they can never be considered fully implemented.

52. The issues concerning staff numbers and contract modalities raised by five evaluations are more complex to resolve because of resourcing issues. The Human Resources Division acknowledged the organization's overreliance on short-term contract modalities and consultant contracts, and there is a concerted effort to address this issue. Following an organizational alignment project launched in 2018 that has now been completed, with its processes mainstreamed in the field, WFP is implementing strategic workforce planning at the functional and country office levels. Six functional plans have been developed and four are being developed, with all functional plans expected to be completed in 2022. A new staffing framework has also been established and is expected to result in further changes in the use of short-term contracts.

3.   Conclusions and recommendations

3.1   Conclusions

53. **Conclusion 1** – Management's high degree of agreement with the recommendations of the ten global evaluations and their firm appreciation of the utility of the recommendations support implementation of the WFP strategic plan for 2017–2021. However, they also mask a tendency for recommendations resulting from evaluations of policies and strategies to include too many operational details and, related to this, to feature unrealistic timeframes that do not respect interdependencies that affect the implementation of recommendations.

54. **Conclusion 2** – While a participatory approach and guidance from OEV on the recommendation formulation process is sufficient and has mitigated these challenges to a large extent, other underlying strategic and organizational factors, such as the need for a corporate perspective that considers competing priorities, strategic and programmatic contexts, available human and financial resources, WFP's relatively high staff turnover and the large proportion of staff engaged on consultant or short-term contracts, require further attention if thematic evaluation recommendations and their implementation are to be improved.

55. **Conclusion 3** – Management response formulation and content are crucial for the effective and efficient implementation of agreed recommendations. The management responses for five of ten reviewed evaluations fully comply with the requirements for adequately addressing the recommendations (relevance), being measurable and having key action owners and realistic timelines. Low scores for actionability are expected to influence WFP's strategic and operational performance.

56.   **Conclusion 4** – It is crucial to involve key staff and future action owners in the formulation of management responses to guarantee full understanding of the content and consequences of recommendations and management response and to create the necessary commitment to and ownership of action plans. Due attention should be paid to the proper allocation of roles and responsibilities and timelines.

57.   **Conclusion 5** – The actions to be implemented in response to evaluations are defined by the management responses approved by the Executive Board. However, in some cases, implementing staff noted that the recommendations evaluation reports provided clearer guidance than the agreed actions in management responses. Although the implementation of actions is monitored in R2, the review was not able to confirm the full implementation of about one third of the actions that were closed and marked as implemented in the tracking system.

58.   **Conclusion 6** – Human and financial resource constraints are recognized as key factors that affect the implementation of recommendations and actions defined in management responses. Improvements in transparency related to the prioritization of financial allocations are under way but require attention. Furthermore, thematic evaluations tend to result in recommendations that require resource allocations based on the limited perspective of their theme or sector; management may too readily agree to these but should instead adopt a wider corporate perspective and reflect competing priorities. In addition, the implementation of recommendations is dependent on the continued support for strengthening the management and coordination of cross-cutting and integrated programmes and processes, functional workforce planning and accountability.

59.   **Conclusion 7** – Major strategic themes covered by the recommendations in the evaluations reviewed are funding and human resources, which are also the subject of the evaluations of the funding of WFP's work and the WFP people strategy for 2014–2017. While some actions remain outstanding, the review cannot draw conclusions on some of the more systemic issues such as whether efforts have led to increased oversight, leadership or clarity on relative priorities that have the effect of maximizing the effectiveness of fundraising efforts, including by minimizing the risk of WFP competing against itself for the same funding sources.

60.   **Conclusion 8** – There are two priority areas that warrant continued attention. In terms of financial resources, outstanding issues relate to consolidated planning on development work, ongoing capacity building to improve services related to funding, timely and transparent internal resource allocation decisions and the positioning of its advance financing mechanisms as sustainable resources for WFP operations. All human resource issues flagged by the evaluations have been addressed in the WFP people policy and the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2025. As these are very recent documents, implementation is ongoing although work has begun on all actions. No implementation gaps were identified; however, staff capacity strengthening and workforce management require continued action and can never be considered fully implemented.

3.2   Recommendations

61.   **Recommendation 1** – Adopt a corporate perspective to bring recommendations of global evaluations and their implementation to a higher level. It is recommended that evaluations:

➢   take into consideration strategic, policy and programmatic contexts, competing priorities and available human and financial resources;

> ➢ produce, as a consequence, fewer prioritized strategic recommendations and include in them fewer operational details, the latter are expected to be set out in action plans developed and implemented under actions in management responses; and

> ➢ pay due attention to the proper allocation of roles and responsibilities in respect of actions and interdependencies that affect implementation.

62. **Recommendation 2** – Guide the implementation of recommendations by producing high quality management responses that are relevant and actionable. This should be achieved by addressing the recommendations adequately (with specific actions identified to implement each recommendation), minimizing inconsistencies in agreements, making actions measurable, properly assigning roles and responsibilities (at the country, regional and headquarters levels), and defining meaningful timelines while respecting interdependencies that affect implementation. It is recommended that WFP:

> ➢ consistently apply guidelines, including WFP's standard operating procedures for management responses to centralized evaluations, which are currently being updated;

> ➢ strengthen guidelines with definitions, clear instructions and examples that increase the relevance and actionability of management response and produce training materials;

> ➢ provide guidance on determining deadlines for actions that will take a long time to complete or whose implementation is contingent on other processes;

> ➢ strengthen the quality assurance mechanisms that should ensure high quality management responses formulated in the spirit of the recommendations, including through the use of quality checklists; in addition, where relevant, comments from country offices, regional bureaux, OEV and headquarters divisions should be included at all stages of management response review and clearance; and

> ➢ organize a workshop on the development of each management response (following the recommendation workshop), led by the designated management response coordinator with contributions from all other units and divisions that are responsible for actions in order to ensure full understanding of the content and consequences of both recommendations and the management response and to ensure optimal ownership of actions.

63. **Recommendation 3** – When formulating a management response, critically review the recommendations. This includes:

> ➢ disagreeing with recommendations that, for instance, are not aligned with WFP policy or that contradict agreed strategic decisions; and

> ➢ acknowledging recommendations to continue implementing an ongoing policy, strategy or action without necessarily defining a new action to be taken.

64. **Recommendation 4** – Further analyse organizational factors that hinder the effective and efficient implementation of recommendations from global evaluations. It is recommended that such analysis cover:

> ➢ transparency related to the prioritization of financial allocations;

> ➢ the management and coordination of cross-cutting and integrated programmes and processes;

> ➢ strategic and functional workforce planning;

> ➢ accountability mechanisms; and

> ➢ the ownership of actions.

65. **Recommendation 5** – When following up on themes of strategic relevance to WFP, the following aspects merit particular attention.

   ➢ management responses should acknowledge human resource and funding recommendations that relate to issues that are often cross-cutting and require action at a corporate strategy level but do not call for action by any particular function;

   ➢ evaluation managers and technical functions reviewing evaluation findings and recommendations should pay close attention to recommended implementation times and advise the evaluation teams about feasible timelines; and

   ➢ attention should also be paid to issues including strategic and action planning, funding for changing lives work and the formulation of WFP's strategic direction.