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SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT – THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC COUNTRY PORTFOLIO (2008–2012)

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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted to the Executive Board for consideration.

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kyrgyz Republic is a small, landlocked, mountainous country classified as low-income, food-deficit. Economic setbacks since 2008 have reversed a positive poverty reduction trend; the country is the second poorest in the region, with about one third of its 5.3 million inhabitants living below the poverty line in 2009. Food insecurity is strongly associated with poverty and is worse in rural areas.

The country portfolio evaluation of WFP activities in the Kyrgyz Republic covers the period from when WFP started operating there in 2008 until 2012. It focuses on: i) the alignment and strategic positioning of WFP's operations in the country; ii) the drivers of key strategic decisions; and iii) the performance and results of WFP operations.

The evaluation found the WFP activities appropriate and their delivery highly efficient. Food aid was appropriate in the Kyrgyz context, was delivered on time and without interruption, and was of high quality. Overall, the portfolio covered 56 percent of the extremely poor and about 90 percent of the severely food-insecure.

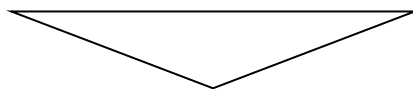
Excellent food security analysis was used effectively for targeting and was useful to development partners. The country office was agile in securing and using resources, and creative in its programming; it established valuable operational partnerships at the regional and local levels.

When food assistance was provided, it made a measurable contribution to recipient household income, leading to more predictable consumption of staples in some of the poorest households at critical times. Food-for-work programmes were highly appreciated by communities and local authorities and showed impact in various ways.

While the portfolio has gradually moved towards better strategic positioning and alignment with government priorities – particularly its food-for-work and new school feeding programme – there is need to increase the integration of food assistance within national social protection efforts and to move from providing stand-alone assistance programmes to supporting structural safety-net reforms.

The evaluation identifies challenges and opportunities for small country offices, and makes recommendations for the country office, the regional bureau, corporate support and WFP's approach to its main donors in the Kyrgyz Republic.

DRAFT DECISION*



The Board takes note of “Summary Evaluation Report – The Kyrgyz Republic Country Portfolio (2008–2012)” (WFP/EB.A/2013/7-B) and the management response in WFP/EB.A/2013/7-B/Add.1, and encourages further action on the recommendations, taking into account considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

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

INTRODUCTION

Evaluation Features

1. The country portfolio evaluation of WFP activities in the Kyrgyz Republic covers the period from when WFP started working there in 2008 until 2012. It serves the dual objectives of accountability and learning and focuses on: i) the alignment and strategic positioning of WFP's operations in the country; ii) the drivers of strategic decisions; and iii) the performance and results of WFP operations.
2. The evaluation was conducted between April and November 2012 by a three-person team, including a national member. Methods included primary data collection in six of the seven provinces, informant interviews, project site visits and extensive document review.

Context

3. The Kyrgyz Republic gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. After an initial economic shock, the economy picked up, poverty and child mortality fell and life expectancy rose. However, economic setbacks since 2008 reversed this positive poverty reduction trend; the country is the second poorest in Central Asia, with 1.7 million people – about one third of the population – living below the poverty line in 2009. Food insecurity is strongly associated with poverty and is worse in rural areas.
4. In recent years, the country has experienced political turbulence. Notably, in 2010 conflict in the south targeting ethnic Uzbeks temporarily displaced hundreds of thousands of people. The country's mountainous terrain exposes it to frequent floods, landslides and earthquakes. The Kyrgyz Republic ranks low on global corruption indices, and has periodic disputes with neighbours over trade and shared water resources.
5. International aid has provided significant policy support as well as financial aid. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries have provided about US\$350 million of aid per year; regional donors such as Turkey and, especially, the Russian Federation, are prominent.

WFP's Portfolio

6. In November 2008, the Prime Minister requested United Nations assistance for people affected by an extremely harsh winter. WFP launched an immediate-response emergency operation (IR-EMOP), which also provided for an office to be opened in Bishkek in December 2008. The first emergency food distributions took place in spring 2009, and a sub-office was opened in the city of Osh in September 2009.
7. Until mid-2011, most of the portfolio and 65 percent of the planned budget focused on emergency relief (see Table 1). Figure 1 shows the numbers of beneficiaries and the increasing importance of food for work (FFW).

TABLE 1: WFP PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW						
	Project type	Number of operations	Requirements (US\$ millions)	% of overall requirements	WFP Strategic Objectives	Activities
2008–2011	IR-EMOP	2	997 488	1	1 – Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies	GFD
	EMOP*	2	47 411 984	59		GFD, VGF and FFW
	Special operation	1	4 431 378	5		Logistics augmentation
2011–2013	PRRO	1	28 097 458	35	2 – Prevent acute hunger and invest in disaster preparedness and mitigation measures; 3 – Restore and rebuild lives and livelihoods; and 5 – Strengthen the capacities of countries to reduce hunger	VGF, FFW, FFT and capacity development
TOTAL		6	80 938 308	100		

* Strategic Objective 3 was added to the second EMOP in 2010, when FFW operations began.

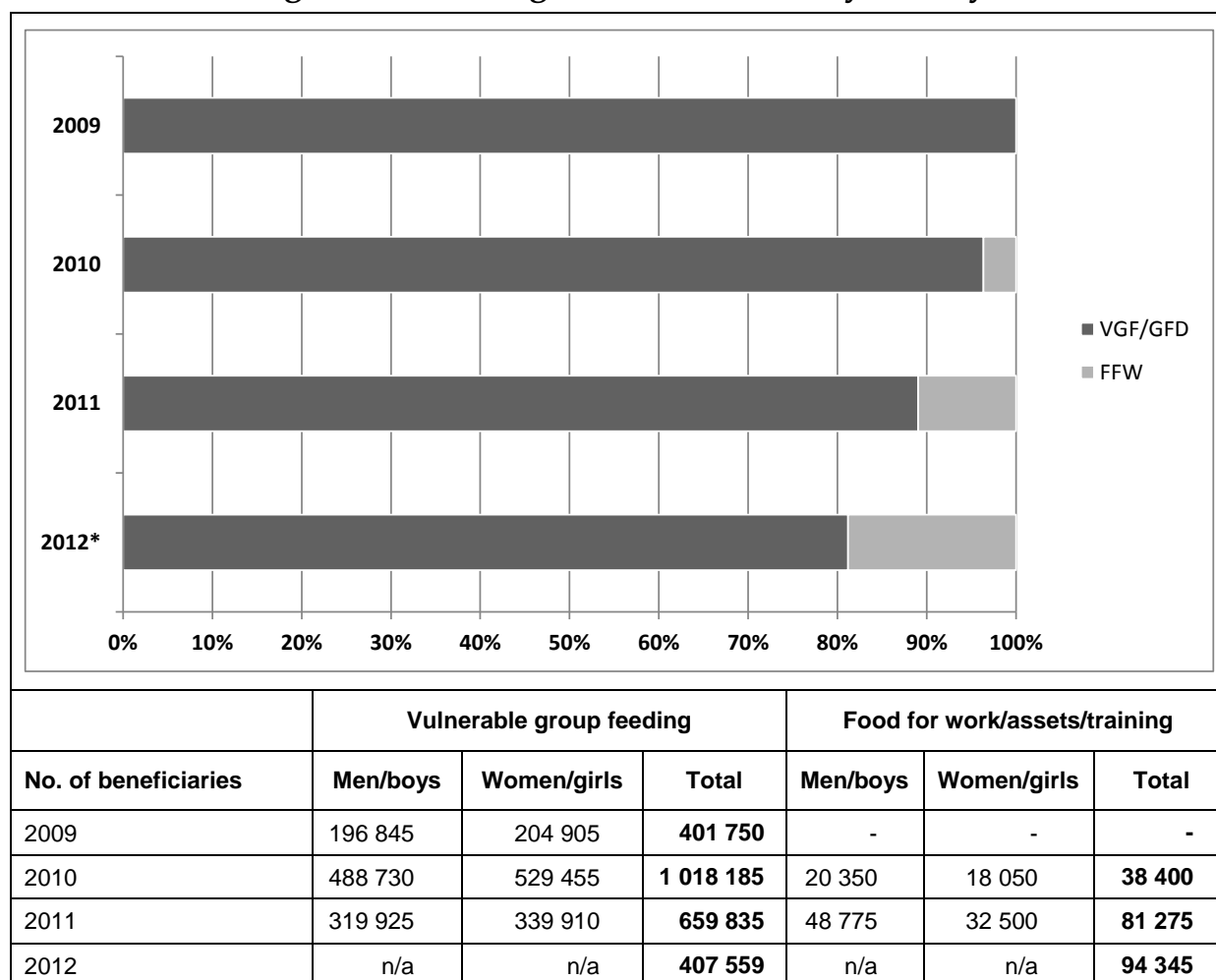
Source: Standard Project Reports.

FFT: food for training

GFD: general food distribution

PRRO: protracted relief and recovery operation

VGF: vulnerable group feeding

Figure 1: Percentage of beneficiaries by activity

* 2012 data from country office.

Note: n/a = not available

Source: Standard Project Reports.

8. The largest contributors were the Russian Federation, followed by the United States of America, multilateral sources and the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund. All contributions were in cash, but most were tied to purchases in the Russian Federation or the region. Emergency work was funded by several donors at more than 70 percent of requirements. By contrast, the Russian Federation was the PRRO's only bilateral donor, providing more than 86 percent of its funding.
9. With total contributions of US\$56 million, the portfolio represented a minute fraction of WFP expenditures worldwide and less than 4 percent of official development assistance to the Kyrgyz Republic during the period. It faced the challenge of implementing WFP's new strategic direction with limited resources for advocacy, capacity development and food-based programme delivery.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Strategic Alignment and Positioning

10. **Evolution of the WFP strategy.** WFP's initial emergency interventions in the Kyrgyz Republic were rapid responses to successive shocks – harsh winter, high food prices and conflict. The two-year PRRO, launched in mid-2011, articulated a more coherent intervention strategy than the preceding EMOPs, gradually shifting from relief activities towards recovery and government capacity development, particularly in food security monitoring.
11. The PRRO aligned better with the Kyrgyz development path – which still faces significant risks, including recurring food price hikes, political instability and natural disasters – and with the chronic nature of food insecurity rooted in poverty. The portfolio thus steadily improved its strategic position.
12. However, despite the evolution of objectives and the use of different programme categories, the portfolio has remained largely the same, dominated by twice-yearly distributions of three months of food aid rations – wheat flour and vegetable oil – to vulnerable families. FFW activities started to change this, but in 2012 still only constituted 19 percent of the portfolio in terms of beneficiary numbers.
13. **Relevance to need.** The two main portfolio activities were found relevant and covered critical gaps. The poorest households depend mostly on seasonal, low-skilled day labour complemented by small-scale subsistence farming and livestock herding. Food insecurity is highly seasonal, peaking at the end of the winter lean season:
 - The autumn VGF distribution contributed to household reserves over the winter; the spring distribution saw households through until planting work started.
 - FFW provided income-earning opportunities that complemented sporadic labour opportunities linked to the agricultural cycle.
14. Beneficiaries preferred food to cash because of corruption concerns and the high quality of the food distributed; they reported that they would have spent most of the cash received on the same staples. The volume and type of food aid appeared appropriate to the national context. As WFP food accounted for less than 3 percent of total imports, and wheat is an imported commodity that people purchase in any case, it did not adversely affect local farmers' livelihoods. With rapidly rising food prices, food aid may provide a hedge against price inflation and stability to the poorest households.
15. **Alignment with national strategies and programmes.** The national poverty reduction strategy includes economic growth and social protection measures that include safety nets. This is congruent with international efforts promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank since the 2008 food price crisis.
16. WFP's VGF programme supported national poverty alleviation objectives. However, although at the corporate level WFP recognizes the importance of situating its interventions in an evolving social protection framework, VGF in the Kyrgyz Republic was not fully aligned with national social protection efforts.

17. Kyrgyz social assistance programmes that have poverty alleviation objectives and target lower-income households include:
 - unified monthly benefit (UMB), a last-resort variable cash benefit targeting children from low-income families and considered the main safety net for offsetting the impact of inflation on vulnerable groups;
 - monthly social benefit (MSB), a cash income-replacement programme targeting disadvantaged groups unable to work; and
 - additional benefits, such as social pay for people in mountainous areas and occasional subsidized food distributions.
18. In 2009, the Government began significant reforms to improve the system's effectiveness and efficiency, supported by donors such as the European Union and agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). An important element was monetizing in-kind benefits. In January 2010, the UMB and the MSB were increased by 18 and 81 percent, respectively.
19. However, a 2010 report by the Asian Development Bank, the IMF and the World Bank revealed that these safety nets were badly targeted, with the UMB missing 67 percent of the extremely poor. Further increases pledged by the Government remained uncertain. Conversations with donors aimed at enhancing efficiency and effectiveness for national safety nets, notably through expanded coverage, fewer exclusion errors and increased benefit levels.
20. The VGF programme, which WFP considered a "top-up" to safety net payments and which ran parallel to the government system, using different methods but similar targeting, may have contributed to inconsistencies in the social welfare system supplied by the Government and WFP. The VGF programme reached only 56 percent of the extremely poor because of scale limits; it was somewhat unpredictable, as beneficiary numbers and target areas varied annually. As VGF had a higher income threshold than the UMB, these factors, compounded by exclusion errors in the Government's safety net programme, meant that some of the poorest received the UMB and VGF, some received one or the other, and some received neither.
21. WFP argued that the direct implementation approach was justified by the limited government capacity. However, the Government implements a much larger social protection programme focused on the same cohort and has the necessary infrastructure; the only issue raised by focus groups was the size of UMB benefits. WFP used the government system at the local level to target beneficiaries and implement its VGF programme.
22. In contrast to VGF, the WFP school feeding project that started in early 2013 was designed to work within national systems from the outset. It assists the Government in strengthening the strategy, design and implementation of the national programme. Implementation is limited to pilot testing of new approaches for the government programme. A joint project with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), launched in late 2011, is transferring knowledge and tools to develop the capacity of the National Statistics Committee (NSC) to monitor food security and analyse production.
23. The FFW component of the portfolio was also better aligned to national efforts for community development, and local authorities designed FFW activities for work that communities could not have afforded otherwise. Stakeholders agree that FFW is less likely than VGF to foster dependency. Most FFW activities focused on: i) disaster mitigation, such as strengthening riverbanks; ii) repairing irrigation canals; iii) tree planting to support

the Forestry Department's reforestation efforts; and iv) supporting women's groups to improve their agricultural practices, including through FFT.

24. **Partnerships.** WFP has an extensive field presence, including in many remote areas, and is well connected to the Government as its main partner in the country. This enhanced the effectiveness of WFP programme implementation. District and village authorities were closely involved in targeting, implementing and reporting on WFP activities.
25. WFP's government network includes the Prime Minister's Office; its main partners are the Ministry of Social Development for VGF, the Ministry of Emergency Situations and the Forestry Department for FFW, and the NSC for the joint WFP/FAO project. However, after four years in the country and despite very cordial relations, WFP – and several other agencies – continues to operate without a Basic Agreement. WFP has not established durable working relationships at the national level, except with NSC, hampering its strategic approach.
26. The high turnover of government senior officials was a serious constraint to engagement and dialogue: there have been 36 ministers of agriculture in the past 21 years and there were three ministers of social development during the evaluation. However, other agencies such as UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have remained engaged. While their longer presence in the country – more than 20 years – may have facilitated this, the evaluation attributed most of the difference to the agencies: i) focusing primarily on leveraging government and donor resources for a social protection and equitable development agenda; ii) working on policy; and iii) implementing stand-alone programmes.
27. Major stakeholders repeatedly made the point that WFP needed to invest more in understanding how the Government works and in influencing – as well as carrying out – activities. The country office is endeavouring to develop this area of work, but is handicapped by the limited resources available for activities not directly linked to food-based programme delivery.
28. Besides the Government, WFP also has valuable partnerships with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and sister agencies. All were highly appreciative and complimentary about WFP, noting that it delivered well on its commitments. These partnerships were more visible and arguably more productive at the operational level, especially in FFW activities (see section on Portfolio Performance and Results).
29. **Donor coordination.** WFP made strong efforts to be part of the donor community and to engage with national policy on food security. WFP and FAO reinvigorated the donor coordination working group on food security, and WFP contributed inputs to the new mid-term development plan. WFP is closely aligned with its major donor to the Kyrgyz Republic – the Russian Federation – but less so with other important donors.

Factors Driving Strategic Decision-Making

30. **Operational analysis.** WFP invests significantly in food security and operational analysis to determine how many people are food-insecure, understand where food insecurity is most prevalent – geographically and socially – and inform programme work. This analysis is widely regarded as being of high quality and is used by a broad range of partners, including the World Bank, as a contribution to their own analyses. It includes:
 - twice-yearly emergency food security assessments (EFSAs), covering household demographics, income, assets, expenditure, food consumption and coping strategies;

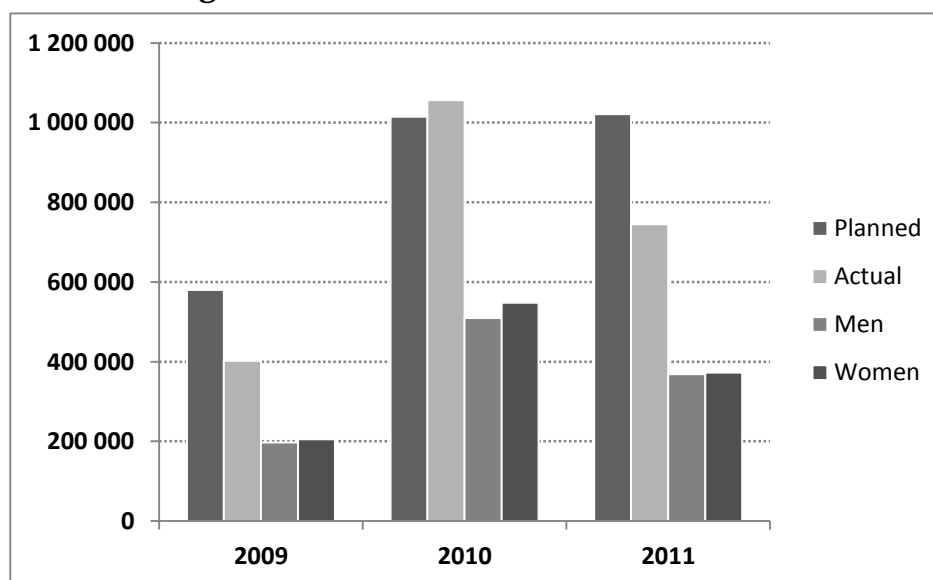
- post-distribution monitoring (PDM) of assistance received, livelihood strategies and WFP's contribution to household food consumption; and
 - market price monitoring to track the monthly prices of staple commodities and other basic necessities.
31. **Strategic analysis and learning.** While the country office's analysis provided good insight into important features of food insecurity in the country – the immediate problem – it gave WFP and partners little information on which strategy might deliver the best, most equitable social protection to the severely food-insecure – the long-term solution. The country office appeared to analyse only the food aid provision, and not the range of policies and measures needed to tackle food insecurity durably. In addition, the effects or impact of WFP interventions were not evaluated.
32. The regional bureau supported the development of the PRRO, and some country office staff attended a regional meeting on cash transfer programming. The regional bureau also provided central policy support, notably for design of the new school feeding programme. However, such a small country office would benefit from greater and more sustained support, perhaps through regional secondments and knowledge exchange. In particular, it could benefit from more systematic sharing of WFP experiences of engaging in social protection and supporting government-led social safety nets in other former Soviet republics; the regional bureau could facilitate this.
33. **WFP systems.** The rigidity of some WFP internal systems may have constrained the country office's strategic and innovative approach, despite the emphasis since 2008 on a new business model at the corporate level and despite lower risks associated with innovation in small offices.
34. For example, the WFP funding formula linked to tonnage distributed creates an operational bias and is particularly unfavourable to small country offices, limiting the resources available for staffing and for testing new approaches. Programme management is also rigid; once an operation is approved at the central level, any change – such as in commodity – requires several levels of approval and is time-consuming and complicated, thus limiting the flexibility to experiment.
35. Despite these constraints, and the lack of a Country Director for 14 months at the time of the evaluation, the country office was creative in using consultancies to fill staffing gaps, bringing maximum benefits at the lowest cost. It also leveraged new corporate initiatives – pilots – which brought resources and drove experimentation. For example, as part of FFW, WFP participates in a multi-agency partnership supporting women's groups, which has been innovative and shows real impact potential.
36. **Donor support.** Another limiting factor was the lack of broad-based donor support. Apart from the Russian Federation's generous, timely and flexible support, contributions were limited. This may have made WFP more conservative about changing its strategy and limited the evolution of the WFP programme.

Portfolio Performance and Results

37. **Efficiency.** Figure 2 shows that WFP exceeded its planned beneficiary number in 2010, and was close to or exceeded 70 percent in 2009 and 2011 – a respectable performance. Women beneficiaries slightly outnumbered men in each year.
38. The targeting system drew on food security analysis – mostly EFSA's – to determine focus areas, and reports from social workers corroborated by WFP field staff to select households meeting the assistance criteria. The criteria were closely aligned to government

safety-net criteria, but the WFP income threshold was slightly higher. The WFP targeting system sought to avoid the exclusions of State safety nets. Names were published and local residents had the opportunity to object. PDM reports suggest that this worked well, despite inevitable issues involving people who did not receive assistance, which were raised in focus group interviews.

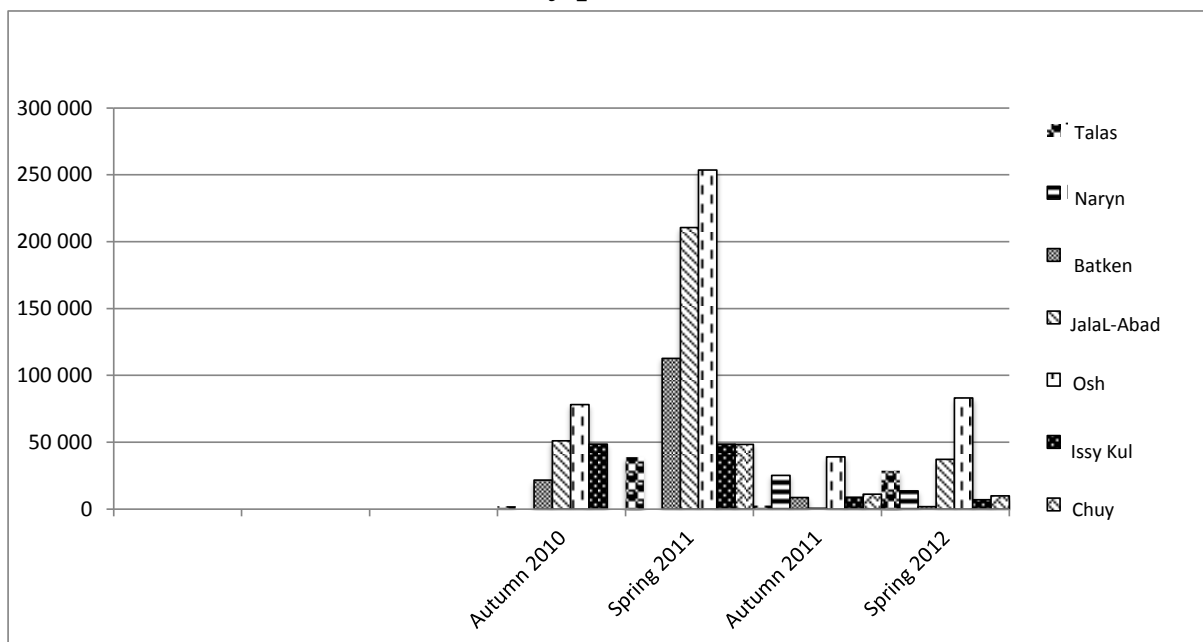
Figure 2: VGF beneficiaries, 2009–2011



Source: Standard Project Reports.

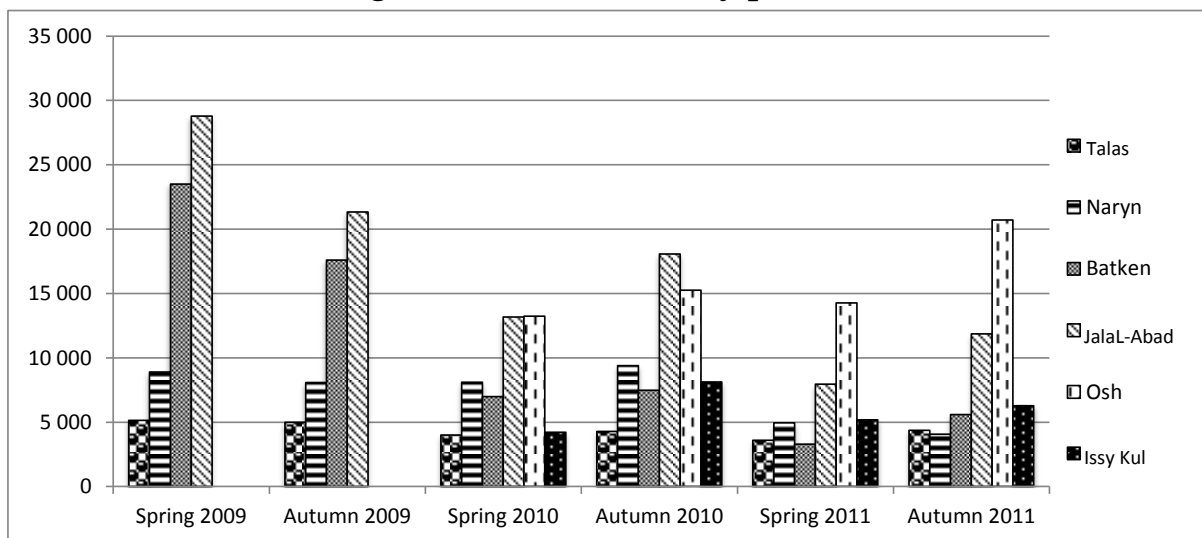
39. The evaluation found excellent logistics, implementation, oversight and quality control. No logistical or supply issues were reported, despite the challenging terrain and restricted access to many communities in the winter. All the beneficiaries interviewed appreciated the quality of the wheat flour and vegetable oil and the timeliness of the assistance; they repeatedly volunteered that WFP measured “to the last gram”.
40. The robust monitoring system provided a very satisfactory compliance and oversight mechanism. It built trust in WFP, which is important in a country where corruption is perceived as endemic. Ten percent of total beneficiaries were randomly monitored on a regular basis. Villages where irregularities were found were blocked from receiving food until matters were resolved.
41. Overall, the evaluation estimated that the programme reached about 56 percent of the extremely poor and 90 percent of the severely food-insecure. While the combination of detailed targeting and efficient delivery proved satisfactory, the shortage of funding left some provinces, such as Bishkek and Chuy, and some districts without coverage, and assistance was not always delivered at the times of greatest need. This was most obvious in spring 2011, when food insecurity was the highest and food distribution the lowest (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3: VGF beneficiaries and periods of severe food insecurity, by province



Sources: EFSA reports and country office data.

Figure 4: Beneficiaries by province



Sources: EFSA reports and country office data.

42. **Cost-efficiency.** Although data are limited, it appears that the programme has been very good value for money. According to crude calculations, the total cost of providing WFP food – including Headquarters overhead – was about US\$30 per bag of wheat flour delivered to beneficiaries. This sum covered due diligence to ensure that the right people received the food, PDM and the raw commodity price, and therefore compares favourably with market food prices of US\$27–US\$32 at the time of the evaluation.

43. **Effectiveness.** Beneficiary interviews revealed that the assistance had a positive effect on household food consumption and reduced the need for negative coping strategies during the lean season. Even more significant was its role as a resource transfer. For larger households, the economic value of VGF was close to that of their annual government social safety-net payment, and could be considerably more under FFW. Households reported spending 10–20 percent less on food following distributions (see Table 2) and using the money saved to buy other essentials such as winter clothes for children, fuel and education materials. However, this effect appears to have diminished over the years.

Year	2010		2011		2012	
	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn	Spring	Autumn
Spring/autumn VGF distributions						
With WFP	39	38	41	55	56	-
Without WFP	53	59	56	63	68	-

Source: PDM data.

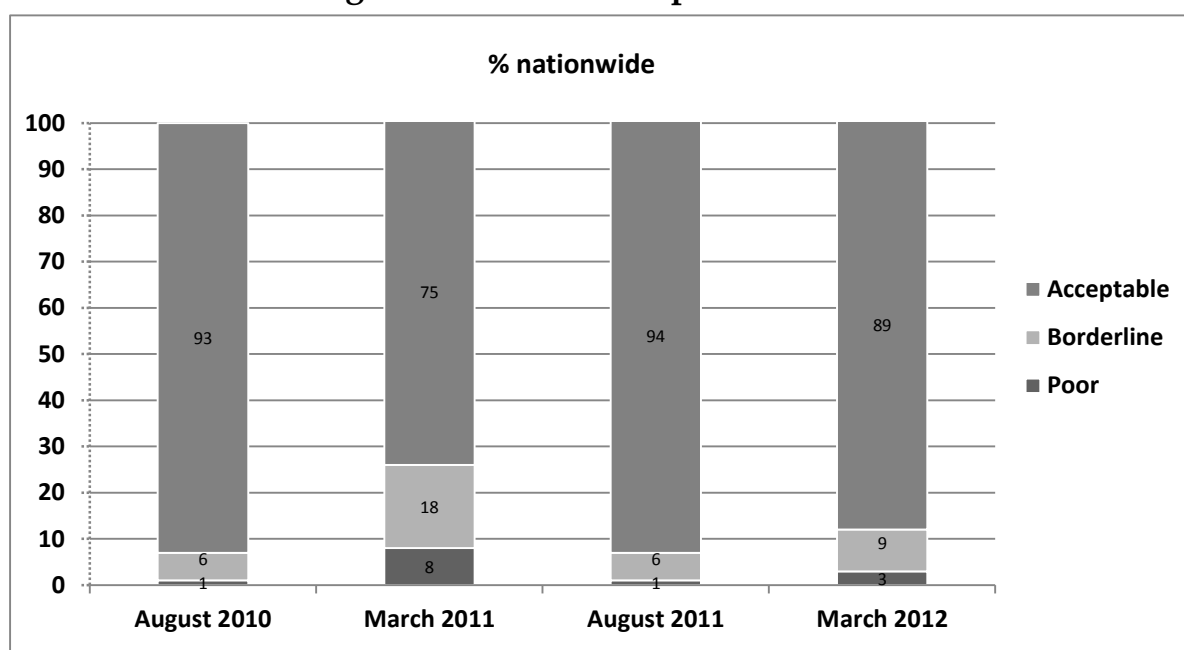
44. The evaluation used the livelihoods framework of the United Kingdom Department for International Development to analyse the effects of FFW activities on productive capacities. It noted clear contributions to a range of livelihoods capital, and anecdotal evidence from focus groups was encouraging on livelihood outcomes (see Table 3). Although FFW was largely opportunistic, its contribution to community development was highly appreciated by communities, officials and partners. It was found most effective when carried out in partnership and integrated into partners' broader projects.

Livelihood assets		Livelihood outcomes
Physical capital	Rebuilding bridges and strengthening riverbanks: 70% of planned output met in 2011. Rehabilitating irrigation canals: 30% of planned output met in 2011.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Riverbank-strengthening schemes tested by spring melt prevented flooding, protecting homes and arable land and producing a meaningful impact on people's ability to use their land and safeguard their assets. ➤ Several new or repaired bridges increased trade flows among villages, enhancing access to markets and services. <p>Quantification of the economic value of combined disaster mitigation and recovery projects was beyond the evaluation's scope, but it is clear that such value exists and is probably greater than the input value, which itself contributed to household income.</p>
Natural capital	Forestry project. Timber used for construction and as fuelwood. 100% of planned seedlings planted in 2011 – site visits revealed that target may be considerably exceeded.	
Financial capital	Providing people with food for their work allowed them to save money from other sources.	Greater income and exponential growth in women's groups.
Human capital	Skills enhancement (Community Development Association, CDA)	Canal cleaning had positive effects on yield, estimated at 20% to 100%. Some collective action started around irrigation canal cleaning, but most farmers interviewed would not engage in the activity without payment, implying that the effect will be temporary.
Social capital	Some small institution building (CDA) and exponential growth in women's groups.	

Source: Evaluation team.

45. Of the four main FFW/FFT/food-for-assets activities, the most appreciated was the support for women's groups project with the Community Development Association (CDA). The scheme involves a collaborative partnership among WFP, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for social mobilization, FAO for training, the World Bank, and the German Agency for International Cooperation for seeds. It forms self-help groups of women, usually migrants or with migrant family members, who receive improved seed varieties and training on improved farming. Food provides an incentive for women to attend training and to work on their plots. The women contribute small monthly savings for buying seeds for the following year. This project was supported with peace-building funds, as it seeks to reduce potential conflict between host communities and migrants.
46. Yields from the new seed varieties were significantly greater than those from the previous crops, increasing household income – and food stocks – and enabling women to escape the poverty trap of poor labour and poor income to achieve greater food security. The project led to exponential growth in women's groups, to about 700 groups with more than 3,000 members nationwide. The groups formed their own NGO so they could bank their savings, and currently hold US\$65,000 in their account.
47. Partnerships with local NGOs allowed the combination of WFP's scale with grassroots activism, resulting in growing numbers of self-sufficient women's groups and greater mobilization of rural residents and community groups – including cooperatives, farmers' groups and agricultural schools – which helped to introduce community development principles and increased the attention to lasting resilience at the local level.
48. Another good example of practical collaboration resulting in tangible outputs is the partnership for disaster mitigation projects, involving UNDP for material and technical inputs, WFP for food for beneficiaries' labour, and local government and the Ministry of Emergency Situations for projects and material.
49. **Impact.** It is harder to draw conclusions on impact given the range of internal and external factors influencing national food security and poverty, which have been increasing since 2008. Contributing factors included external economic pressures – not least the global economic downturn, which increased the food and fuel prices to which the Kyrgyz Republic is highly sensitive as a net food importer, with migrant labour and remittances constituting up to one third of the economy.
50. The significant temporary increase in the percentage of people with poor or borderline food consumption in spring 2011 was most likely caused by the 2010 conflict and the sharp increase in food prices (see Figure 5). Data show that extreme poverty is numerically concentrated in Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces, which were the most affected by the conflict. Displacement, border closures and disrupted markets and employment patterns worsened the situation despite WFP blanket feeding during the second half of 2010.
51. Extrapolating from data on programme coverage and the positive household effects noted earlier, it can be concluded that WFP assistance likely contributed to mitigating the impact of shocks.

Figure 5: Food consumption over time



Source: EFSAs.

52. **Sustainability.** Only small elements of the current programme are sustainable. VGF and much FFW would likely stop without WFP's assistance, and questions regarding communities' willingness to maintain some FFW assets remain despite country office efforts to obtain communities' commitment. The school feeding programme has the potential to be more sustainable, as it pilots approaches that the Government has the capacity and financial resources to maintain.

CONCLUSIONS

53. The evaluation found WFP activities appropriate and their delivery highly efficient. Food aid was appropriate in the Kyrgyz context, was delivered on time and without interruption, and was of high quality. Excellent food security analysis was used effectively for targeting and was useful to development partners. The country office was agile in securing and using resources, and creative in its programming. It established valuable operational partnerships at the regional and local levels.
54. When food assistance was provided, it made a measurable contribution to recipient households' income, leading to more predictable consumption of staples in some of the poorest households at critical times. FFW programmes were highly appreciated by communities and local authorities and showed various impacts.
55. While WFP assistance reached more than half of the extremely poor, the national-level impact is less clear. There is a close correlation between food insecurity and poverty, with poverty rising over the portfolio period because of adverse global and regional economic factors and internal instability. WFP assistance was not of sufficient scale to counter these more significant factors.
56. Issues related to the portfolio's strategic positioning and alignment may also have constrained impact. The portfolio gradually improved its strategic positioning in the local context and its alignment with government priorities – reflected in FFW, the food security monitoring system and the new school feeding programme.

57. There is need to position the food assistance programme better within the national social protection programme and to move from stand-alone assistance programmes to supporting structural safety-net reforms, which are a priority of the Government and its partners. The end of the PRRO presents a good opportunity for the country office to start a new planning process towards integration of the WFP and government systems.
58. The evaluation highlighted other constraining factors: WFP's operational bias, reinforced by its funding formula linked to tonnage distributed; the inflexibility of some internal procedures, limiting innovation; and dependency on a single donor.

LESSONS

59. WFP's move from food aid to food assistance presents implementation challenges for small country offices. The Kyrgyz Republic's experience provides valuable lessons for tackling these challenges.
60. WFP's funding model makes it particularly difficult for small country offices – those running small programmes – to cover policy and advocacy roles as well as programme implementation. However, as host countries progress they are likely to need proportionately more policy and technical support and less direct implementation.
61. To maximize impact in these contexts, WFP needs a different country office funding model. Expertise is also needed in productive safety nets, chronic nutrition issues, innovative social policy such as conditional cash transfers, best practice in monitoring and evaluating such systems, and cutting-edge food security and poverty analysis.
62. Small country offices can also be testbeds for innovation. They can more easily pilot new approaches and feed lessons back to the wider organization for scaling up.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Country Office

63. **Recommendation 1: WFP should undertake a formal country strategy process.** This will require analysis of WFP's comparative advantage in the Kyrgyz Republic and its complementarity with other actors in the country. There should be a move from implementation to policy support and advocacy. WFP should continue to focus on reducing food insecurity in the country, but less through food aid than through better targeting of social protection schemes and benefits and development of the rural economy. WFP should also help the Government establish plans for dealing with emergencies of the type encountered in 2008 and 2010 – as in the September 2012 earthquake simulation exercise.
64. **Recommendation 2: The country strategy should seek to integrate the VGF programme into government safety net/social protection schemes.** WFP must use its on-the-ground experience to influence the conception and delivery of these schemes. This will require policy analysis and advocacy resources – people – in the office to design the WFP programme and to work with the Government on integration. It is not possible to recruit the necessary country office/regional bureau staff using budgets related to tonnage.
- 2a) WFP vulnerability analysis and mapping/EFSA and experience should be used to inform targeting and be integrated into the government safety-net system. WFP should leverage its current programme with the European Union for this purpose.

- 2b) The transition will take time; WFP may need to extend its PRRO for at least a year.
- 2c) WFP should seek to ensure that the government safety net can be expanded quickly in times of emergencies.

65. **Recommendation 3: WFP should continue increasing the percentage of FFW/FFT in the PRRO extension to facilitate the transition.** With the Government, it should explore the use of such public work schemes for more general poverty alleviation and development projects – as a productive safety net. This work should be linked to ongoing efforts to increase local administrations' capacity to plan and implement projects.

For the Regional Bureau

66. **Recommendation 4:** The regional bureau should help the country office design its social safety-net programme, drawing on regional experience, including through study tours and secondments. This requires knowledge management to facilitate sharing of expertise and experience across the region. A more coherent regional approach to evaluation could assist, with country teams helping to evaluate each other's programmes and the systematic sharing of evaluation reports.

For WFP Headquarters

67. **Recommendation 5: WFP should rethink the role of smaller country offices and support them accordingly.**

- 5a) Small country offices may not be large enough to implement programmes at the national scale, so they will have to work on influencing government policy and interventions as much as on delivering food aid. There is need for Headquarters support to country office policy work.
- 5b) Small country offices need fundraising support, so they can avoid single-donor dependency and be creative in securing resources for influencing government policies and interventions. An additional budget line should be available for smaller offices, to enable them to do the necessary policy work.
- 5c) WFP rules and procedures should allow small country offices flexibility to operate effectively. These offices should be seen as opportunities for innovation – where new approaches can be tested with a receptive audience in government.

With WFP's Donors

68. **Recommendation 6: WFP should engage donors in any change of approach, such as the transition from food aid to a food security approach integrated into general government social protection mechanisms.** It should also:

- 6a) encourage donors to support and fund WFP policy work as well as direct assistance; and
- 6b) encourage larger donors to engage with government on designing a more effective food security system.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

CDA	Community Development Association
EFSA	emergency food security assessment
EMOP	emergency operation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFT	food for training
FFW	food for work
GFD	general food distribution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	immediate response
MSB	monthly social benefit
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSC	National Statistics Committee
PDM	post-distribution monitoring
PRRO	protracted relief and recovery operation
UMB	unified monthly benefit
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VGf	vulnerable group feeding