Update on WFP's policy formulation paper (2011): an annotated outline

Informal consultation

8 March 2022

World Food Programme
Rome, Italy

Background and purpose

1.   WFP's policy formulation paper describes the normative framework within which WFP formulates policy and the governance of WFP policies under the Board's purview. At the Board's 2020 annual session, WFP management committed to reviewing the 2011 policy formulation paper[1] as part of efforts to strengthen its portfolio of policies aimed at helping to achieve the objectives of the strategic plan and guiding the formulation of country strategic plans (CSPs).[2]

2.   The updated paper elaborates on how WFP identifies policy gaps and priorities within its mandate and how it organizes to develop policies that are built on the principles of evidence, partnerships and programmatic coherence. The paper also reaffirms the role and functions of the Board in providing strategic oversight of WFP's policy development, which were originally defined in WFP's General Regulations, General Rules and Financial Regulations.[3] It provides an overview of WFP's normative framework, including policy governance and the policy cycle, defines the types of policy documents and related policy instruments generated by WFP, and clarifies accountability mechanisms and the role of the Board.

3.   This outline offers the basis for an informal consultation on policy formulation with the Board. It incorporates elements of the Board-approved policy formulation document from 2011, lessons learned and evaluation findings and best practices on policy formulation and implementation gathered from interviews with relevant WFP staff, United Nations partners and other sources. A full, updated policy formulation paper will be presented to the Board for consideration at its annual session in June 2022.

WFP's normative framework

4.   The normative framework is an iterative mechanism that situates WFP within the evolving global policy environment and outlines how WFP strives to contribute – through action-oriented policies – more meaningfully to lasting solutions to hunger and malnutrition. The normative framework provides a structure that enables WFP to ensure that the priorities of its governance bodies are translated into policies; to capture global expertise and evidence generated by the United Nations system, research institutions, governments and civil society; and to feed external and internal learning and trends into its strategic and policy planning processes in order to respond to global challenges and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

5.   The normative framework also provides the organizing principles for WFP's policy cycle, helping to define how policies are developed, implemented, evaluated and adapted at the field level. WFP is committed to ensuring that the views of field staff, particularly the operational evidence that they generate, consistently inform the development of policies. Such a "ground up" and participatory approach helps to ensure that policy implementation plans are feasible and pragmatic. Policy reviews and evaluations provide a critical and independent feedback mechanism that in turn helps to guide the formulation and implementation of policies.
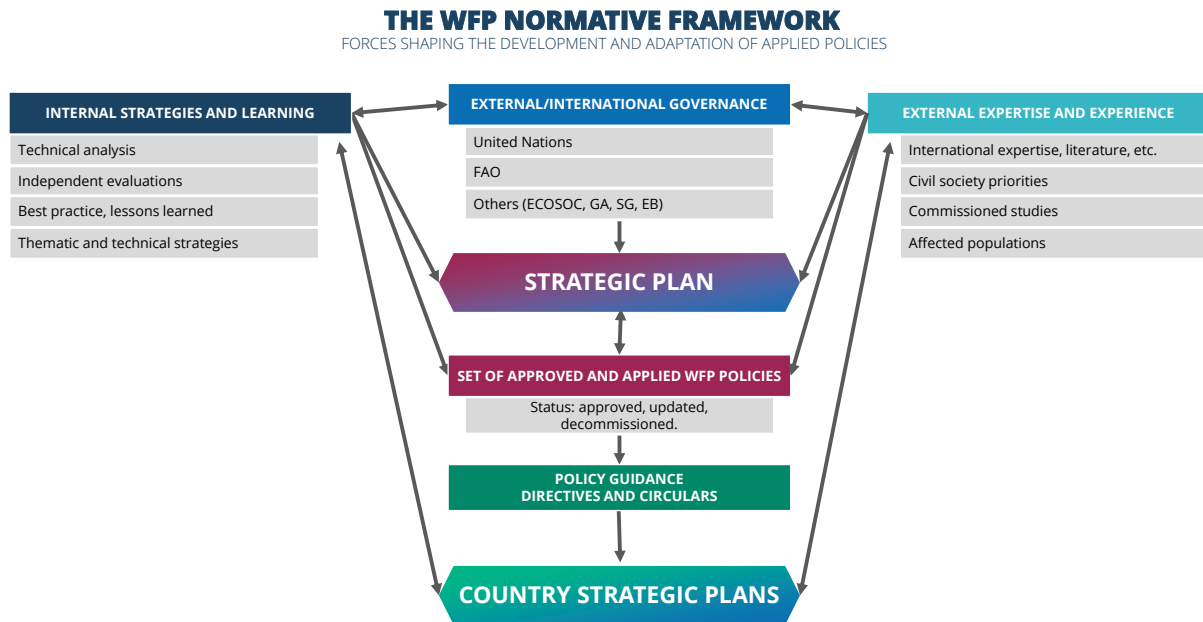
---

[1] WFP. 2011. "WFP Policy Formulation" (WFP/EB.A/2011/5-B).

[2] The update also addresses recommendations from a synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations. WFP. 2020. "Synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations (2011–2019)" (WFP/EB.A/2020/7-D).

[3] WFP. 2001. "Guidelines for the meetings of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme" (WFP/EB.1/2001/4-B).

6.   The policy framework reflects the organization's values of integrity, collaboration, commitment, humanity and inclusion[4] and the moral imperatives embedded in its mandate of saving and changing the lives of the people it serves. Policies developed within the overall framework include those that shape how WFP carries out operational activities and those that ensure that the organization has the tools and systems in place, including the right approaches to workforce, partnership and risk management, to deliver on its mandate.

Figure 1. WFP's normative framework

THE WFP NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK
FORCES SHAPING THE DEVELOPMENT AND ADAPTATION OF APPLIED POLICIES

INTERNAL STRATEGIES AND LEARNING	EXTERNAL/INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE	EXTERNAL EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE
Technical analysis	United Nations	International expertise, literature, etc.
Independent evaluations	FAO	Civil society priorities
Best practice, lessons learned	Others (ECOSOC, GA, SG, EB)	Commissioned studies
Thematic and technical strategies		Affected populations

STRATEGIC PLAN

SET OF APPROVED AND APPLIED WFP POLICIES
Status: approved, updated, decommissioned.

POLICY GUIDANCE
DIRECTIVES AND CIRCULARS

COUNTRY STRATEGIC PLANS

Abbreviations: EB = Executive Board; ECOSOC = Economic and Social Council of the United Nations; FAO = Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; GA = General Assembly; SG = Secretary-General.
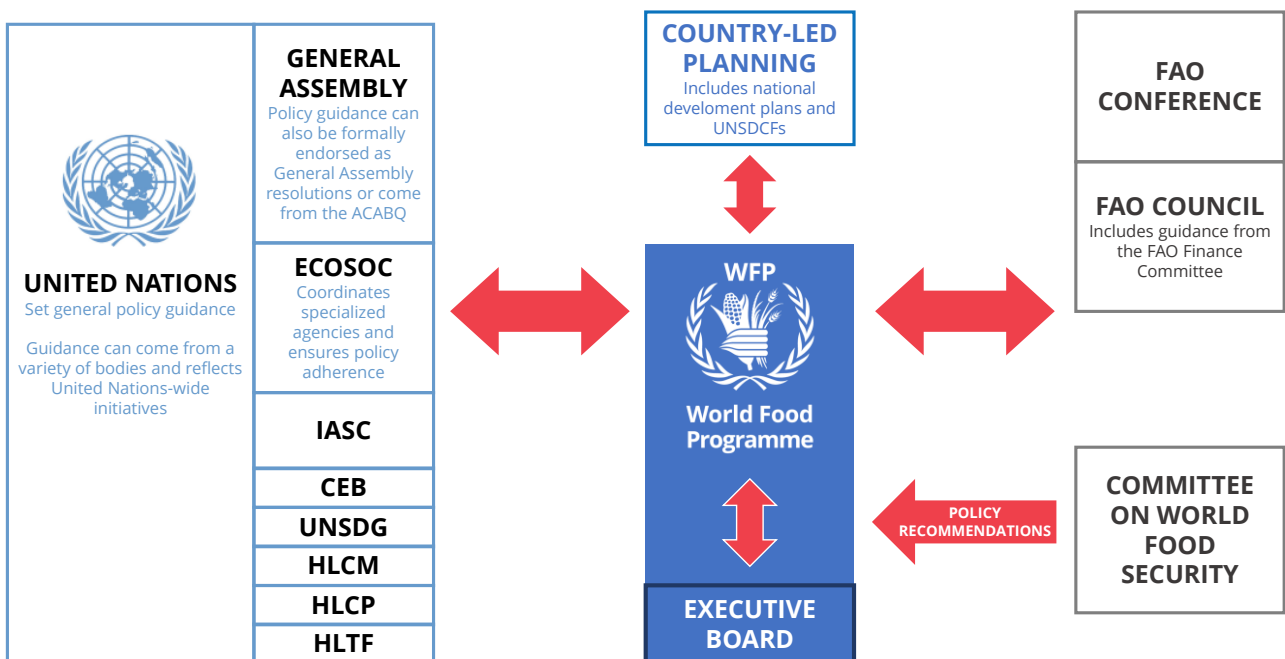
The governance regime for WFP policies

7.   The General Regulations, General Rules and Financial Regulations assign the Board the responsibility for providing WFP with intergovernmental support and specific policy direction that are consistent with the overall policy guidance provided by the United Nations General Assembly, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Conference, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and the FAO Council. The Board provides an annual report to ECOSOC and the FAO Council, detailing progress on the implementation of the policies formulated by the General Assembly and the FAO Conference and the coordination measures and guidance received from ECOSOC and the FAO Council.

---

[4] See https://newgo.wfp.org/documents/wfp-values.

8. Figure 2 illustrates how the United Nations General Assembly, the FAO Conference, ECOSOC and the FAO Council provide policy guidance to WFP. The General Assembly and ECOSOC can provide policy guidance to the FAO Conference and Council. WFP's active participation in the reform of the United Nations development system at the global level, and the development of United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks and common country analyses at the country-level ensures a coherent and effective channel through which national priorities feed into the policy framework.[5]

Figure 2. Policy governance

Abbreviations: CEB = United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination; HLCM = High-Level Committee on Management; HLCP = High-Level Committee on Programmes; HLTF = High-Level Task Force; IASC = Inter-Agency Standing Committee; UNSDCFs = United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks; UNSDG = United Nations Sustainable Development Group
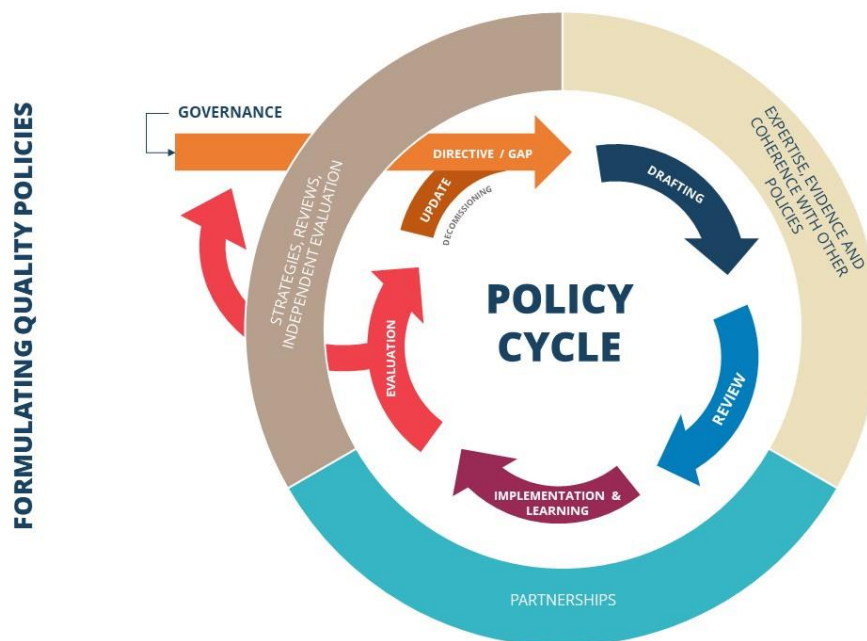
Elements of the policy formulation cycle

9. The following are the various elements of the policy formulation cycle shown in figure 3, along with the lead entities identified for each:

  ➢ *directive/gap*: United Nations system, WFP Secretariat, Executive Board, strategic plan, relevant divisions;

  ➢ *decision to pursue a new policy*: Oversight and Policy Committee (OPC), Executive Board (the policy instruments may be deemed more relevant);

  ➢ *evidence and formulation (research, analysis, consultations, peer review)*: lead WFP division;

  ➢ *review of policy:* policy cycle task force (PCTF), OPC, Executive Board (as relevant);

---

[5] The United Nations Secretary-General also provides policy guidance. For instance, "Our Common Agenda" lays out dozens of actions for the United Nations system to accomplish in the next 25 years. Some of those will be captured in forthcoming General Assembly resolutions and will help to guide WFP's policy formulation.

> ➤ *implementation and learning:* management, relevant WFP divisions, regional bureaux, country offices;

> ➤ *independent evaluation:* Office of Evaluation with lead WFP division; and

> ➤ *decision to update/decommission policy:* WFP Secretariat, recommendation by the Office of Evaluation and response from lead WFP division (with support from PCTF and approval from OPC).

10. WFP manages its portfolio of policies through the OPC and the PCTF, which are internal mechanisms that set the policy agenda and priorities, shepherd the formulation of policy, and ensure policy coherence. The PCTF is hosted in the Programme and Policy Development Department and aligns policies to support the implementation of the strategic plan and thereby feed into the design of CSPs.

11. Policy formulation requires significant staff time, and careful planning and prioritization. The average timeline for the development of a policy from conception to endorsement is 24 months.

Figure 3: The policy cycle

12. The following are key steps in the formulation of WFP policy.

13. *Agreement on the need for a new policy.* A new policy may be required when a clear and specific need related to WFP's mandate is identified. The aim of developing a policy is to codify a new way of thinking or a body of evidence that is not captured in WFP's current set of policies. A new policy implies a significant change in how WFP operates, rather than an adjustment or refinement of existing practices (which can normally be articulated through a policy update). The normative framework is the mechanism through which potential policy gaps are identified – drawing on policy guidance, learning, external evidence and expertise and the strategic plan – and the decision to formulate a new policy is taken by the WFP Secretariat based on consultations with major stakeholders, including Board members.

14. *Formulation.* The development of a policy or policy update is steered by an external and/or an internal mechanism, as appropriate, such as a reference group, which ensures that the policy contents are developed with inputs from across and outside WFP. Under the direction

of the Assistant Executive Director of the Programme and Policy Development Department, a PCTF supports the development of a policy by drawing on best practices and advising on options for policy formulation.

15. *Internal review of draft policy.* A new policy or policy update requires peer review by technical experts and the PCTF.

16. *Implementation and learning.* WFP is committed to ensuring that a new policy or policy update is followed by the formulation of guidance on implementing the policy in the field. While the specifics vary, the launch of a policy or policy update generally includes:

   ➢ an agreed plan for policy roll-out at the various levels of implementation – headquarters, regional and country;

   ➢ a dissemination and communication strategy for internal and external dissemination;

   ➢ the development and implementation of policy guidance;

   ➢ a funding and human resources strategy;[6] and

   ➢ a monitoring and evaluation plan.

17. Implementation of the policy will depend on the type of policy and the situation in the country concerned. Some policies, for instance corporate policies on human resources or procurement and WFP's commitments with respect to gender, are applicable throughout WFP and in every country office. Others may be more applicable in specific country contexts than others. WFP country office management and staff are expected to implement WFP policies to the fullest extent appropriate, bearing in mind the priorities and needs in the specific country and the partners, capacities and funding available to implement WFP's programmes.

18. *Evaluation.* All policies are formally evaluated by the Office of Evaluation between four and six years after the start of implementation. Evaluation provides an important source of accountability and learning, and efforts have been made to ensure that sufficient time and capacity is dedicated to leveraging evaluation results to improve policies and programme excellence.[7] Findings from an evaluation will confirm the ongoing validity of the policy and its implementation or identify a need for an update to the policy, a new policy or the decommissioning of a policy.

19. *Decommissioning.* In some cases, a policy will be decommissioned. This can be based upon a recommendation of an evaluation or determination by WFP management that a policy is no longer relevant (e.g. because it has been subsumed within a new policy or the international context has changed significantly). In such cases, the Board will be informed, the policy compendium will be updated to reflect the change, and the WFP Secretariat will work to ensure that references to the policy are removed from internal and external documentation.

---

[6] Budgeting for the implementation of policies at the corporate or operational level is incorporated into the management plan or CSP budgeting processes.

[7] WFP Office of Evaluation. 2018. *Top 10 Lessons for Policy Quality in WFP*.

Categories of policies at WFP: shaping operational activities and corporate culture and practices

20. WFP categorizes its various policy documents in an annual policy compendium,[8] which includes: drivers of food and nutrition insecurity; principles; strategic outcomes and cross-cutting priorities; and enablers and corporate policies:

    ➤ Policies on principles articulate a corporate position that guides decision-making in relation to management, operations and programming. For instance, WFP's policy on humanitarian principles[9] describes the ideals that provide the basis for a framework to guide humanitarian action and help to justify why WFP works in a particular way to ensure good-quality assistance and accountability.

    ➤ Policies on drivers of food and nutrition insecurity and strategic outcomes and cross-cutting priorities are programmatic policies, which establish WFP's level of ambition and objectives in important areas of work to address food insecurity and malnutrition. Such policies seek to change the way in which WFP programmes its work in key areas and sets a priority direction for CSPs, but do not include specific time-bound targets. Programmatic policies direct country offices on "what" to do and "why" in order to achieve the aims outlined in the strategic plan. They also inform operational guidance for the field on "how" to achieve those aims.

    ➤ Corporate policies aim to ensure that WFP's workforce, partnerships and systems are adapted to its mandate. This set of policies enables WFP to operate in an accountable manner, providing the building blocks to achieve the results of the strategic plan. They help WFP to organize its systems and actions in a way that maximizes the results of its operations and programming.

Elements of good-quality policies

21. While there is no set template of what to include in a policy, particularly as the purpose of each policy will vary,[10] the elements that are generally required for an effective, actionable, good-quality policy can include:

    ➤ context;

    ➤ evidence base;

    ➤ purpose and scope;

    ➤ principles, objectives and expected results;

    ➤ policy coherence within the United Nations system and WFP's normative framework;

    ➤ partnerships; and

    ➤ monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

---

[8] WFP. 2022. "Compendium of policies relating to the strategic plan" (WFP/EB.1/2022/4-D).

[9] WFP. 2004. "Humanitarian Principles" (WFP/EB.A/2004/5-C).

[10] "Policy-making is now such a broad term that it cannot be examined using a single model". Jones, H., Jones, N., Shaxson, L. and Walker, D. 2013. *Knowledge, policy and power in international development: a practical framework for improving policy*. Overseas Development Institute Background Note January 2013.

Complementary policy instruments

22. A new policy is part of a set of instruments that WFP can deploy to achieve the objectives of the strategic plan and guide the development and implementation of CSPs. In certain situations or contexts, however, another instrument may be more appropriate:

   ➢ A *policy update* may be recommended in an evaluation triggered by a review of WFP's portfolio of policies during the development of a new strategic plan or by the emergence of new trends and evidence that will help to shape the direction of programmes and operations. The principles and broad objectives of a policy do not change in an update.

   ➢ In some cases, management may develop *an implementation plan* for a newly adopted policy or policy update. The plan will outline the activities to be undertaken at headquarters and in regional bureaux to ensure corporate implementation of a policy. While policy implementation plans are under the purview of WFP management, in exceptional cases – such as for a corporate policy – a plan may be shared with the Board for information.

   ➢ A *thematic or programme-based strategy* is a contextualized action plan developed by the divisions in headquarters and at the regional bureaux to support country offices in implementing a specific area of programming or mode of delivery, focusing on guidance, capacities and resourcing. Under the responsibility of management, strategies are guided by staff in a specific unit or technical area and have explicit programmatic targets and timeframes.

   ➢ Revised *policy guidance* can help to address gaps in the WFP normative framework that result from shifts in global needs and international policy, and to ensure that country offices have the most relevant and up-to-date evidence and learning.

Oversight and contribution of the WFP Executive Board

Formal oversight under the rules and regulations of WFP and its Executive Board

23. WFP is committed to working with the Board to ensure a robust normative framework and that WFP's policy development furthers its contribution to achieving the SDGs through its operations.

24. This paper reconfirms the classification of policy documents shown in table 1, which was first recommended by the Board in 2001 through the approval of the Guidelines for the meetings of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme[11] and confirmed in 2011 with the approval of the policy formulation paper. The aim is to ensure that the capacities of Board members are effectively leveraged in the governance of WFP's policies and the formulation of policy. New policies are provided to the Board for consideration, although they may be shared for approval on an exceptional basis. Policy updates and implementation plans for corporate policies are shared with the Board for information.

25. The Board uses the following three classifications of documents:

   ➢ *For approval*: for documents such as budgets, general regulations or general rules mandated by the Board, or those relating to matters that ECOSOC or the United Nations General Assembly has asked the Board to decide on.

---

[11] WFP. 2001. "Guidelines for the meetings of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme" (WFP/EB.1/2001/4-B).

> ➢ *For consideration*: usually for documents on policy, administrative or organizational matters on which the Board gives an opinion or guidance to the Secretariat.

> ➢ *For information*: for documents that present information about a given issue.

TABLE 1: CLASSIFICATION OF BOARD DOCUMENTS		
For approval	**For consideration**	**For information**
➢ Corporate budgets ➢ General regulations ➢ General rules ➢ Annual performance report ➢ Annual financial statements ➢ Strategic plans ➢ Country strategic plans*	➢ Policy papers ➢ Reports of the Inspector General ➢ Evaluation reports ➢ Post-delivery loss reports ➢ Audit reports	➢ Implementation plans of corporate policies** ➢ Programme of work ➢ Policy updates ➢ Other reports (progress reports, field visit reports)

* CSPs have replaced the former country programmes.

** Corporate actions plans have been replaced with implementation plans of corporate policies.

Informal guidance and sharing of expertise

26.   Bilateral consultations and exchanges of views between the Secretariat and Board members offer an opportunity to discuss potential gaps in existing policies and proposals for new policies in order to help ensure that WFP is best supporting nations in meeting emergency needs and achieving the SDGs. When the Secretariat and the Board agree that bilateral consultation may not be sufficient, "informal consultations" may be agreed to. In general, these are limited to the discussion of new policies, or in some circumstances policy updates, that are of importance to a majority of Board members.

27.   The Secretariat may also organize consultations and seminars with Board members to ensure that the broadest range of views is heard and that Board members are contributing to the work of the Secretariat, and learning as they do so.

Acronyms

CSP	country strategic plan
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
OPC	Oversight and Policy Committee
PCTF	policy cycle task force
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal