
ANNEX VIII: LESSONS LEARNED FROM EVALUATIONS IN 2021

1. The 13 centrally managed evaluations completed in 2021 provide robust evidence for decision making at WFP. The reports covered evaluations of seven country strategic plans (CSPs), for China,¹ El Salvador,² Honduras,³ Lao People's Democratic Republic,⁴ Lebanon,⁵ the Gambia⁶ and Zimbabwe;⁷ strategic evaluations of the contribution of school feeding activities to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁸ and WFP's use of technology in constrained environments;⁹ a joint evaluation of United Nations Rome-based agency (RBA) collaboration;¹⁰ evaluations of the WFP policy on South-South and triangular cooperation¹¹ and WFP's response to the COVID-19 pandemic;¹² and a synthesis of evidence and lessons on country capacity strengthening from decentralized evaluations.¹³
2. All the evaluations noted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on operations and WFP employees, with a sharp rise in the number of beneficiaries needing assistance. The evaluation of the WFP response to COVID-19 noted that the pandemic had created a "perfect storm" for humanitarian actors by disrupting supply chains, closing borders and schools and severely affecting the health and well-being of populations across the globe. The pandemic resulted in unprecedented humanitarian needs, with 270 million people directly at risk of acute hunger.
3. WFP entered the COVID-19 pandemic with significant expertise and experience in emergency response. While partners praised WFP for its agility, flexibility and ability to scale up, there were challenges: WFP's global emergency response and preparedness systems and advance financing mechanisms were still being developed or adapted; risk systems were still maturing; limitations on surge capacity persisted; and knowledge management systems remained informal. As the pandemic unfolded, 66 CSPs were revised to respond to new conditions by including emergency-related outcomes, shifting targeting and modalities and revising budgets as appropriate, although budget revision processes proved lengthy. WFP's use of digital technologies for internal work processes and the delivery of assistance to beneficiaries meant that the organization was well prepared for – and able to adapt effectively to – the circumstances imposed by the pandemic and resulting restrictions.
4. The seven CSPs evaluated in 2021 were for countries in five of WFP's six regions, so they represent a diversity of programming environments. All CSP evaluations reported a high degree of alignment with government programmes and priorities. They also documented shifts made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the establishment of new partnerships (El Salvador), the scale-up of cash-based transfers (Lebanon) and a shift to

¹ [WFP/EB.2/2021/6-C/Rev.1.](#)

² [WFP/EB.1/2022/6-C.](#)

³ [WFP/EB.1/2022/6-D/Rev.1.](#)

⁴ [WFP/EB.2/2021/6-E/Rev.1.](#)

⁵ [WFP/EB.2/2021/6-F.](#)

⁶ [WFP/EB.2/2021/6-D.](#)

⁷ [WFP/EB.1/2022/6-E.](#)

⁸ [WFP/EB.A/2021/7-B.](#)

⁹ [WFP/EB.1/2022/6-A.](#)

¹⁰ [WFP/EB.2/2021/6-B/Rev.1.](#)

¹¹ [WFP/EB.2/2021/6-A.](#)

¹² [WFP/EB.1/2022/6-B.](#)

¹³ [WFP/EB.A/2021/7-C.](#)

in-kind food transfers and the targeting of urban populations (Zimbabwe). Evidence on efficient use of resources was varied across the seven CSP evaluations. Insufficient data limited the extent of analysis in some countries (Honduras, Lao People's Democratic Republic) and complex programming environments hampered a clear analysis of efficiencies (Lebanon). Efficient and timely delivery of programmes was reported in China, El Salvador and Zimbabwe. Economies of scale were gained as programmes grew and common services were provided on a full-cost recovery basis in many countries.

5. The evidence on beneficiary targeting was varied. In some countries, beneficiary targeting was based on vulnerability assessments and seen as adequate in certain programme areas (school feeding and nutrition in the Gambia, resilience in Zimbabwe). Some countries broadened the concept of what constitutes a fragile setting and prioritized groups with intersectional vulnerabilities¹⁴ (El Salvador) or made no distinction among groups or geographic locations (Lebanon). Others lacked clear prioritization or targeting strategies (Lao People's Democratic Republic, Zimbabwe), which limited WFP's ability to reach the most vulnerable people (Lebanon), despite good coverage in some cases.
6. Strategic and policy evaluations noted a lack of systemic consideration of gender in the design of school feeding programmes, the development of digital technologies and the policy on South-South and triangular cooperation. The evaluation of WFP's response to the COVID-19 pandemic noted that WFP did not scale up its human or financial resources to enhance gender equality despite the fact that the pandemic exacerbated gender inequality. Under the pandemic response, any increased attention given to gender issues at the country level lacked corporate support, which limited the potential for transformative change. The lack of gender-transformative approaches or results was also noted in the evaluations of the CSPs for El Salvador, Honduras, Lebanon and Zimbabwe.
7. The strategic evaluation of school feeding's contributions to the SDGs identified strong partnerships with host governments, political commitment and strategic planning and budgeting frameworks as key success factors for national ownership of school feeding programmes. However, while an increasing number of countries have adopted school feeding policies, often with WFP's support, national expenditures in this area have increased only marginally. The evaluation found that "the transition to nationally owned school feeding programmes is a long-term process and requires internal analysis of preconditions, country readiness, challenges and opportunities. WFP has not developed sufficiently effective, realistic, gradual, comprehensive and well-supported and monitored transition strategies or plans."¹⁵
8. The strategic evaluation on the use of technology in constrained environments found that while WFP provided training for partners on critical digital technologies – including during the COVID-19 pandemic – it did not invest adequately in building the capacity of its partners beyond the implementation of specific technologies. WFP-brokered South-South and triangular cooperation contributed to changes in country capacity at the policy, institutional and, to a lesser degree, community levels, notably in relation to school feeding and, increasingly, nutrition programming.

¹⁴ "Intersectionality" refers to the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.

¹⁵ WFP/EB.A/2021/7-B, p. 13.

9. The synthesis of evidence on country capacity strengthening from decentralized evaluations identified success factors such as the conduct of capacity needs assessments, with the incorporation of findings into programme design; the integration of advocacy with technical advice aligned with national government frameworks; the development and nurturing of relationships with key counterparts; the planning of capacity strengthening interventions that targeted the individual, institutional and enabling environment levels simultaneously; and the development of clear transition strategies and plans with national partners at an early stage.
10. Capacity strengthening activities were carried out to a greater or lesser extent under all seven CSPs. Certain country offices prioritized capacity strengthening activities with government partners in the education, social protection and emergency preparedness sectors. The Gambia and Lao People's Democratic Republic country offices scaled up the handover of school feeding programmes to government counterparts. The strengthening of social protection systems was the focus in Lebanon and Zimbabwe, with the aim of fostering effective nationally owned emergency and refugee assistance programmes. The sustainability of interventions was hindered by a lack of confirmed financial commitments from governments (China, Honduras), a lack of ownership by governments (El Salvador, Honduras, Lebanon, Zimbabwe) and a lack of explicit handover strategies in the CSP (El Salvador, Honduras, Zimbabwe).
11. Country capacity strengthening support expanded under WFP's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including in respect of supply chains, logistics, food security monitoring and analysis, and programme design. The evaluation of the pandemic response documented WFP supporting governments in 65 countries by scaling up and adapting existing social protection measures in response to COVID-19, developing policy frameworks and refining targeting. WFP also led, or co-led with governments, the coordination of the logistics and supply chain aspects of the United Nations response, including by engaging in the supply chain interagency coordination cell. It provided technical support and advice on supply chains, storage and handling of humanitarian and health cargo. procurement of goods and services, and tangible logistics assets and services. For example, in Honduras the Government requested WFP's support for the entire supply chain, including cash-based transfer delivery channels and the procurement and distribution of commodities.
12. Operationally, WFP stayed to deliver during the pandemic even when many other organizations departed. WFP's contribution to the global humanitarian response through its common services earned the appreciation and respect of partners around the world. Increasingly, WFP is seen as a critical and fundamental systems enabler, without which the international humanitarian response to the pandemic – and ultimately people who are hungry and poor – would have been severely compromised.
13. The evaluation of the response to the pandemic noted some early-stage tensions in WFP's relations with some other United Nations entities, but most were resolved, laying the foundations for future collaboration. The joint evaluation of United Nations RBA collaboration found that "RBA staff routinely act on the advantages of collaboration where they see it makes sense. Although competition for resources continues in some contexts, there is widespread recognition of complementarity."¹⁶ In China, the RBAs shared knowledge effectively, but practical alignment and collaboration were limited. WFP participated in the United Nations Delivering as One initiative in the Gambia, but the CSP evaluation found that the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO were insufficiently involved in the home-grown school feeding programme at both the national and regional levels. The El Salvador CSP evaluation noted that "cooperation with other United Nations entities made it possible to expand beneficiary coverage and mobilize funds; however, the extensive

¹⁶ WFP/EB.2/2021/6-B/Rev.1, p. 10.

inter-agency work was neither explicitly acknowledged as an intervention modality in the CSP nor included in the CSP reporting system.”¹⁷

14. The joint evaluation of RBA collaboration also recognized that WFP has built valuable partnerships with other United Nations agencies, based on pragmatism and practicality. The strong alignment of the CSP for Lao People’s Democratic Republic with the overall objectives of the United Nations partnership framework for the country contributed to working relationships with the other RBAs and the United Nations Population Fund and resulted in complementarity with the United Nations Children’s Fund in some provinces. WFP’s school feeding strategy has accelerated the establishment of external partnerships, but these have remained largely at the global level. The strategic evaluation of school feeding found that while WFP drew on those stronger partnerships to enable the COVID-19 response, country-level opportunities to strengthen collaboration with other United Nations entities, private sector partners and regional organizations engaged in learning and research were largely missed.
15. The joint evaluation of RBA collaboration also noted that “collaboration and the achievement of the RBAs’ shared objectives are still impaired by misunderstandings about the mandates of FAO and WFP”¹⁸ and by administrative and governance-related differences. These differences are among those that also hinder the provision of common technological platforms for the humanitarian community. WFP is leading the provision of digital technology services throughout the humanitarian sector but tends not to adopt or use technologies developed by others. The strategic evaluation on the use of technology in constrained environments found that despite a high demand for more partnerships in digital technology at the country level, the supply was limited owing to market competition, insufficient funding and unclear roles and responsibilities. An exception to this was in Lebanon, where the CSP evaluation noted a high level of collective investment in the nationally managed targeting model. Support for this national platform was found to be an example of WFP working in partnership with other organizations to improve the effectiveness of practices through joint learning.
16. The strategic evaluation on the use of technology in constrained environments found that “digital technologies have generally helped to increase the efficiency, scale and frequency of monitoring and to overcome monitoring challenges in constrained and emergency settings.”¹⁹ In contrast, the strategic evaluation on school feeding found that the regular monitoring that should facilitate reporting on basic standards of delivery often fell short.²⁰ The China CSP evaluation noted that WFP lacked an outcome monitoring and knowledge management system and was not able to demonstrate results or generate lessons systematically. The CSP evaluation in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic was unable to draw conclusions regarding WFP’s contribution to results owing to an overall lack of data and the impossibility of disaggregating monitoring data by government versus WFP-supported schools. Limitations in WFP’s monitoring framework were found to have restricted the understanding of effectiveness, sustainability and targeting in El Salvador. In contrast, in Honduras comprehensive monitoring data, vulnerability analysis, surveys and reports were generated and used for results-based management, internally and by external stakeholders. WFP has improved its work on monitoring, reporting on and disseminating internal knowledge on South–South and triangular cooperation as a result of the inclusion of an indicator measuring the number of country offices benefiting from South–South and triangular cooperation in the revised corporate results framework. “Reporting against this

¹⁷ WFP/EB.1/2022/6-C, p. 15.

¹⁸ WFP/EB.2/2021/6-B/Rev.1, p. 11.

¹⁹ WFP/EB.1/2022/6-A, p. 8.

²⁰ WFP/EB.A/2021/7-B, p. 11.

indicator has been fragmented and, while it has provided insights into how [South–South and triangular cooperation] gained in visibility within WFP, has not generated any insight into the results of WFP-facilitated [South–South and triangular cooperation].”²¹ The synthesis of decentralized evaluations found that while new country capacity strengthening indicators had been included in the revised corporate results framework in 2019, improvements were still required in the linking of outcome indicators to high-level and long-term measures of reductions in food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly in development contexts and middle-income countries.

17. The CSP evaluations continued to highlight that the unpredictability and earmarking of funds presents significant challenges to WFP, limiting the ability to “do the right thing at the right time”. This hindered the continuity of implementation and the ability to set and deliver on long-term visions and strategies, which are essential when addressing the root causes of hunger, and country capacity strengthening. The integration of activities foreseen in the CSP model is not yet fully realized, leading to missed opportunities for internal efficiency and effectiveness gains. The evaluations also revealed the challenges WFP faces in obtaining development financing for work in middle-income countries, where donor engagement and domestic fiscal space are relatively limited.
18. Similar challenges were noted in the strategic evaluation of school feeding contributions to the SDGs, where the challenge in mobilizing funds for capacity strengthening work hampered sustainability, particularly in middle-income countries. Funding for South–South and triangular cooperation has increased somewhat in recent years but the sources of extrabudgetary funds for it remain limited. Technological innovation has also seen increased funding, but the strategic evaluation found it difficult to assess whether current funding was sufficient for the volume of work being carried out. WFP’s approach to “call forward” existing resource commitments to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic was seen as novel and successful despite limited increases in the flexibility of funding.
19. In most evaluations, WFP’s human resources were reported to have performed and adapted very well, but challenges remained in many areas. While some country offices reported high staff retention (Zimbabwe), high turnover and the loss of experienced staff risked disrupting WFP’s operations and led to reduced morale (Lebanon). Recruitment processes were delayed in many places, with positions remaining vacant (China, El Salvador, the Gambia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic), which led to inefficiencies. Country-level staffing for the implementation and enabling of school feeding programming fell short. Gaps in technical capacity for upstream advocacy were particularly evident, and there were also important gaps in foundational digital skills among staff, who increasingly require moderate to complex computer skills. A major global surge response to the COVID-19 pandemic was launched to support staffing at the country level. “Despite initial challenges, over 500 deployments took place. Human resource and staff well-being systems were adapted on a real-time basis, with greater flexibility and devolution of decision making appreciated by country-based staff. To support physical and mental well-being, additional medical staff were recruited, new procedures implemented and staff counselling services expanded.”²²

²¹ WFP/EB.2/2021/6-A, p. 11.

²² WFP/EB.1/2022/6-B, p. 10.

20. WFP was found to have “stayed and delivered” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. “Programmatic action on the ground continued, with cash support, often as part of national social protection responses, and were scaled up to address new and emerging needs. New populations were served with agility, and WFP expanded into urban areas. Technical advice and support were supplied, along with supply chain and logistics support and new, often atypical, requests were addressed with flexibility and agility. [...] However, these achievements had a high human cost. WFP owes an immense debt to its workforce, which – at all levels – shouldered the burdens of staying to deliver amid often intense conditions of strain. A service-based ethos; individual identity as humanitarians; a culture of flexibility; the familiarity of running towards an emergency even as others leave; and a resolute commitment to the people WFP serves all played their part.”²³

²³ Ibid, p. 18.