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FAO-WFP/Ricci Shryock

Annual Report for the Strategic Advisory Panel on Impact Evaluation at WFP

2019 in Review



April 2020

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Foreword



To achieve Zero Hunger by 2030, WFP and our partners need to identify what works best for the people we serve. We have to know which interventions are – and are not – successful. To do this, we must both generate and follow the evidence.

In 2019, WFP published its first ever Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026), with the explicit aim of supporting the organization to use rigorous impact evaluation evidence to inform policy and programme decisions, optimise interventions and provide thought leadership to global efforts to achieve Zero Hunger. New programmes, technologies and data sources present opportunities for WFP to harness the full potential of impact evaluation as a tool for learning.

WFP's Office of Evaluation has established a Strategic Advisory Panel to guide efforts as we pilot new approaches to delivering rigorous impact evaluations. As Director of Evaluation, I am pleased to share the first Annual Report of the Strategic Advisory Panel, which captures progress to date and lessons learned from piloting our new strategy.

Director of Evaluation
Andrea Cook

Strategic Advisory Panel Annual Meeting

19 February 2020

INTRODUCTION

Impact evaluation can make a major contribution to saving lives and changing lives. With the launch of a new Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026), WFP signals its ambition to contribute globally relevant evidence on what works best to achieve Zero Hunger, including in fragile and humanitarian contexts. However, delivering impact evaluations in WFP's operational contexts can be challenging. Achieving the objectives set out in the Impact Evaluation Strategy will require learning from experience gained by WFP and external partners.

The Strategic Advisory Panel (SAP) has a critical role to play in guiding and supporting WFP to interpret lessons learned and identify opportunities for improving its impact evaluation function. This annual report outlines the progress made in implementing WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy in 2019, and presents a summary of discussions at the Annual Meeting of the Strategic Advisory Panel.

PANEL MEMBERS

Ben Davis, Strategic Programme Leader on Rural Poverty Reduction, FAO

Marie Gaarder, Executive Director, 3ie

Macartan Humphreys, Professor of Political Science, Columbia University, and Director of Institutions and Political Inequality Group, WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Robert Darko Osei, Associate Professor, ISSER, University of Ghana (Absent with Apology)

Sara Savastano, Director of Research and Impact Assessment (RIA) Division, IFAD

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DISCUSSION HIGHLIGHTS

- ▶ **Overall progress in 2019:** Panel members welcomed WFP's recent efforts to use impact evaluations in a more strategic manner, acknowledging the significant progress made during the first year of its new strategy.
- ▶ **Internal vs external strategic focus:** The panel sought clarifications on the focus and nature of the strategy, which was seen by some members as being WFP-centric, and less detailed on addressing impact evaluation-related issues outside WFP. OEV explained that the ambition of Objective 1 in the strategy is to contribute to global evidence, and that the partnerships with governments and other humanitarian actors will play a significant role in how the strategy is implemented. However, WFP still needs to develop its internal capacity to a point where it can play a more active role in global impact evaluation communities.
- ▶ **Narrowing priority areas:** The panel questioned whether the five priority areas identified in the Impact Evaluation Strategy, and aligned with WFP strategic directions, are too broad. Agreeing that the priority areas are broad, OEV explained that they are narrowed down to focus on more specific questions during the development of window concept notes. However, even at this stage, many of the questions identified remain high-level in order to allow for the flexibility of identifying country- and programme-specific questions during the design of individual impact evaluations.
- ▶ **Humanitarian impact evaluation:** Focusing on the initial selection of impact evaluations for windows, the panel observed that the portfolio is lacking in humanitarian response interventions. Members highlighted that WFP's major contribution to evidence would come from increasing its focus on impact evaluations of humanitarian interventions, which is recognised as a global evidence gap. Following a discussion on the feasibility of developing impact evaluation approaches to embed within humanitarian responses, panel members recommended exploring the possibility of developing a library of pre-approved evaluation designs that fit a range of humanitarian interventions and can quickly be embedded in future responses.
- ▶ **Linking impact evaluation to wider M&E:** The panel also recommended placing greater attention on the link between impact evaluation activities and wider monitoring and evaluation efforts. OEV outlined the recent restructuring of the research, assessment and monitoring functions in WFP, and agreed more effort should be made to ensure complementarities with impact evaluation activities.
- ▶ **Cost-effectiveness analyses:** A panel member highlighted the potential for impact evaluations to support cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analyses, both of which require collecting accurate cost data. However, another panel member cautioned against taking an

overly simplistic approach to valuing the benefits associated with outcomes like gender equality and women's empowerment, in which benefits are not easily observable and may manifest only in the long-term.

- ▶ **Capacity building in a decentralised organisation:** The panel recognised the challenges associated with building capacity and awareness for impact evaluation in a large decentralised organisation. Members from FAO and IFAD highlighted the importance of having enough in-house experts. For UN agencies, the need for capacity building also extends to government partners, who are important potential users of evidence generated. This was highlighted as an area where UN agencies, particularly Rome-based agencies, could work together to improve.

FROM EVALUATION TO POLICY

OEV facilitated a group discussion focused on exploring the question:

From your experience, what are some effective ways to generate awareness, build organisational capacity, and help people engage in impact evaluation?

Among the responses, three strategies emerged for bridging the gap between evaluation or research communities and the programme communities to build awareness and capacity:

- ▶ **Hands-on experience:** Demystify impact evaluation by getting different stakeholders involved. Bringing different WFP offices and professions, particularly programme teams, into impact evaluation processes can help build capacity and awareness and break down any divisions that may stem from a lack of experience or interaction. This requires a lot of direct interaction and back-stopping from OEV.
- ▶ **Adding value:** Demonstrate the value of impact evaluation by highlighting the kinds of evidence that can be generated and used. Encouraging WFP senior management to showcase, or endorse, a high-profile impact evaluation can help build awareness and demonstrate its value to the organization. This strategy can also support the development of a learning culture in WFP, where managers systematically ask for evidence that an intervention or approach is effective.
- ▶ **Building communities:** Encouraged WFP to build a community of practice around impact evaluation, which would include internal and external members. Rome-based agencies are involved in building impact evaluation capacity, which offers a natural opportunity for sharing information and forming partnerships.

Throughout the year, WFP will continue to engage the panel members and broader communities of practice on key strategic decisions.



WFP/Shehzad Noorani

WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy

STRATEGY AND PILOT

Impact evaluation is not new to WFP. Since the 2016 Evaluation Policy, WFP has commissioned both centralised evaluations (CEs) managed by the Office of Evaluation, and decentralised evaluations (DEs) managed by other WFP divisions and offices. However, both the Evaluation Policy and Strategy are neutral in terms of the types of evaluation and do not explicitly address impact evaluations. Prior to its new impact evaluation strategy WFP produced 26 impact evaluations on diverse topics, mostly ex-post (after project completion) and using quasi- or non-experimental methods (e.g. difference-in-difference or matching). The result is a variety of one-off impact evaluations of different levels of rigour and usefulness.

In November 2019, WFP officially launched its new Impact Evaluation Strategy, detailing the vision, objectives and activities to be implemented by WFP to harness impact evaluation as a tool that informs WFP's programming. The strategy aims to achieve this vision by delivering impact evaluations that contribute to the global evidence base while still maintaining relevance to WFP operations.

To do this, WFP has established four strategic objectives for impact evaluation, to: 1) contribute to the evidence base for achieving the SDGs; 2) deliver operationally relevant and useful impact evaluations; 3) maximize the responsiveness of impact evaluations to rapidly evolving contexts; and 4) harness the best tools and technologies for impact evaluation.

Achieving the vision and objectives set out in the strategy will not be easy for WFP. The first two years of implementing the new strategy are therefore a pilot phase, where OEV will assess the latent demand for impact evaluation evidence in WFP and explore different models of delivering them in rapidly evolving contexts. During this time, OEV will increase impact evaluation awareness and capacity within WFP and establish partnerships to support evaluation delivery. In 2021, lessons learned during the pilot phase will be incorporated into WFP's next corporate Evaluation Policy. The SAP will play a key role in helping OEV to reflect and learn during the pilot phase and beyond, with its members providing guidance and direction for implementation.

Vision of the Impact Evaluation Strategy

WFP uses rigorous impact evaluation evidence to inform policy and programme decisions, optimize interventions, and provide thought leadership to global efforts to end hunger and achieve the SDGs.

GOVERNANCE

More broadly, WFP's evaluation function reports to the Executive Board through the Director of Evaluation. WFP also has an Evaluation Function Steering Group (EFSG), composed of members of WFP management from outside of the evaluation function, that advises on implementation of the Policy. Additionally, each impact evaluation is supported by an Evaluation Committee established by OEV and the participating country office. Each impact evaluation relies on inputs from its specialized Reference Group and members of a Technical Advisory Group. Details of the governance structure for the impact evaluation function can be found in annex 5.

Progress in 2019

Development of the Impact Evaluation Strategy began in June 2018, after creation and recruitment of a new Evaluation Officer (Impact Evaluation) post to lead impact evaluation in WFP. Though the new strategy was officially launched in November 2019, a variety of actions related to achieving objectives set out in the strategy were undertaken during the year as detailed below:

IMPACT EVALUATION ACTIVITIES IN 2019

Following internal consultations in 2018 with programme divisions in WFP OEV identified several priority areas for generating evidence, including 1) Cash-based transfer modalities; 2) Gender equality and women's empowerment; 3) Climate change and resilience; 4) Nutrition; and 5) School Feeding. These priority areas were then confirmed through further consultations in 2019. WFP is piloting ways of generating demand for evidence and guiding support towards conducting impact evaluations in these priority areas.

For centralised evaluations, OEV is trying out impact evaluation 'windows'.¹ WFP's impact evaluation windows are portfolios of impact evaluations that are OEV-led and co-funded between OEV and the country office. Each

impact evaluation within a window is designed to meet the specific evidence needs of the participating country office. At the same time, windows are created to test mechanisms associated with the impact of interventions on WFP's target outcomes across different contexts in a manner that can increase external validity of evidence generated. To support formal syntheses of this evidence, each window is guided by a window-level pre-analysis plan, the ambition being to produce portfolios of impact evaluations that increase WFP's ability to predict what works well, for whom, under different circumstances. Two windows were launched in 2019: the Cash-based Transfers (CBT) and Gender window, and the Climate and Resilience window.

OEV is also offering to deliver 'priority' impact evaluations on behalf of other WFP offices and donor partners. A major challenge for decentralising impact evaluations is WFP capacity in country offices to manage long-term and complex studies, in contexts with frequently rotating staff and rapidly evolving operations. Priority impact evaluations are directly managed by OEV to provide continuity and support, as well as to ensure that evidence generated contributes to organisational learning. Whenever possible, priority impact evaluation evidence will be combined with ongoing and future windows.



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1. OEV developed impact evaluation windows based on experience gained from the World Bank's Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) unit, Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP), JPAL, and 3ie.

IMPACT EVALUATION WINDOWS

Cash-based Transfers (CBT) and Gender Window

Preparations for the CBT and Gender Window began in the fall of 2018 with internal and external consultations, resulting in a window concept note (see annex). Following the recruitment of a coordinator, the window was launched with a call for expressions of interest from country offices in February 2019. Of the 13 country offices that contacted OEV for more information, 11 officially submitted an expression of interest. Of these, eight country offices were invited to a workshop in Rome in May. The weeklong workshop was delivered in partnership with the World Bank's DIME unit. It provided a combination of impact evaluation training and consultations with country offices to further understand their cash-based programmes and scope for impact evaluations focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes.

The first Technical Advisory Group (TAG) workshop was then held with DIME at the World Bank in July, to review the impact evaluation proposals from each country office and pass their recommendations for the initial country programme selection. DIME presented an initial draft of a window-level pre-analysis plan to the TAG in order to get feedback on what questions and impact evaluation design elements are most relevant to practitioner and academic communities outside WFP. Consideration was given both to the feasibility of the evaluations as well as their ability to contribute to window-level evidence and synthesis. The TAG made the following three recommendations:

- 1) To include the following impact evaluations in the window: Burundi, El Salvador, Kenya, and Syria.
- 2) To develop tools and measurement strategies for GEWE outcomes and conducting impact evaluations in hard-to-work settings
- 3) To conduct a second, more targeted call for proposals in early 2020 to fit a certain cluster of evaluation questions that align with the window-level pre-analysis plan

DIME assigned a principal investigator to each evaluation selected for the window, and conversations with country teams continued together with OEV. Over the rest of the year, principal investigators conducted visits to the country offices and further developed the impact evaluation plan and timeline. In the course of these discussions, the Burundi country office concluded that with the current programming, an impact evaluation would not be feasible. OEV decided to re-engage with the Burundi office in the future when timing is more suitable.

At present, the three impact evaluations still included in the CBT and Gender Window (Syria, Kenya, El Salvador) are in the initial stages of designing and conducting baseline surveys and defining programme implementation.

Climate and Resilience Window

A WFP strategic evaluation of WFP's support for enhanced resilience was presented to the Board in February 2019 and highlighted the importance of generating better evidence for what works, particularly for food security and resilience interventions in conflict and protracted crises. Following this recommendation, OEV identified resilience as a high thematic priority for impact evaluation evidence. Efforts to generate impact evaluation evidence included launching the window, as well as developing a portfolio of priority impact evaluations in partnership with DIME and BMZ, the German development agency.

Preparations for the window began with a workshop in May 2019 which brought together stakeholders from WFP, The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). A window coordinator was subsequently recruited in July 2019 and, following significant internal consultations, the call for expressions of interest was finally launched in November, with a deadline for submission of 31 December. OEV will then engage with all interested country offices to finalise the list of countries invited to a design workshop in March 2020, location to be determined.

PRIORITY IMPACT EVALUATIONS

At the same time as preparing the climate and resilience window, OEV worked with country offices, regional bureaux, and UN partners to develop concept notes for impact evaluations of bilaterally funded programmes. OEV received funding approvals from BMZ for a series of priority resilience impact evaluations in DRC and South Sudan, as well as for an evaluation programme covering the Sahel.

The priority impact evaluation in DRC is being delivered in partnership with DIME, FAO and UNICEF. The evaluation in South Sudan is being delivered in partnership with DIME and UNICEF. While it is not guaranteed that all BMZ-funded resilience impact evaluations will be fully aligned with the window-level analysis plan, it is very likely that these priority impact evaluations will contribute evidence to the window.



WFP/Saikat Mojumder

PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES IN 2019

Partnerships are essential for implementing the new strategy, which identifies a wide range of communities that WFP seeks to engage with and support in different capacities, including joint learning on how best to deliver impact evaluations in difficult contexts. OEV intends to leverage WFP's scale and influence towards supporting the generation of impact evaluations that are meeting the evidence needs of stakeholders in the sectors it operates.

In May 2019, WFP signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the World Bank's DIME unit for an initial five years (2019-2023). Although WFP has a well-developed corporate evaluation function, it has limited capacity to design or deliver impact evaluations. In addition, WFP does not have a large in-house research function. Delivering impact evaluations therefore requires working with other organisations that have a proven track record of delivering rigorous impact evaluations in WFP contexts.

The MoU covers a wide range of impact evaluation activities, including technical advice, design support, data collection, analysis, etc. The ambition of this partnership is to learn from the World Bank experience delivering impact evaluations in a large decentralised organisation like WFP. To the extent possible, WFP will try to ensure that each

impact evaluation delivered in partnership with DIME also includes OEV staff as part of the impact evaluation teams in order to encourage learning.

WFP also made significant efforts to engage with other UN agencies in 2019. Both UNICEF and IOM presented their ongoing work to increase in-house impact evaluation capacity at WFP's global evaluation meeting in May. OEV also presented its cash-based transfers and gender window, as well as the new strategic direction at both the FAO and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Towards the end of 2019, OEV finalised the concept notes for the two joint impact evaluations in DRC and South Sudan in consultation with UN partners.

Outside of the UN, OEV has been actively engaged in developing a community of practice around impact evaluation in fragile and humanitarian contexts. This has involved bringing the International Rescue Committee (IRC), Oxfam and World Vision into the reference group for the cash-based transfers and gender window. It has also involved supporting the development and strengthening of WFP's impact evaluation partnerships with the Islamic Development Bank and Green Climate Fund.

CAPACITY AND RESOURCES IN 2019

WFP's capacity to deliver the strategy will be shaped by human and financial resources. The following section gives a brief overview of the current situation and expectations for 2020.

Human Resources

Although WFP is not completely new to impact evaluation, many staff have had very limited involvement in them. Prior to the 2016 Evaluation Policy all impact evaluations were managed directly by OEV.

However, the new impact evaluation strategy has placed much greater emphasis on the rigour of evidence produced, requiring all designs involve a credible counterfactual. This push towards more experimental and quasi-experimental designs also requires a culture shift in WFP, as the timing and resources required are needed before any intervention. As part of the Strategy, OEV has begun to build this awareness through the window processes, the ongoing EvalPro training programme for decentralised evaluation managers, as well as senior level engagement with the Evaluation Function Steering Group and Executive Board.

Regional evaluation officers (REOs) also play a significant role supporting country offices to use impact evaluations. REOs are the first point of contact for advice on decentralized evaluations and play a key role in identifying needs and opportunities for capacity building. For IE Windows, they are well-placed to identify upcoming country programming which align with the thematic area, and they take an advisory role in the Evaluation Committee for each window impact evaluation in their region.

In addition to capacity building across WFP, OEV is also working to increase in-house capacity to deliver the Impact Evaluation Strategy. At the end of 2019, OEV's dedicated impact evaluation team is composed of one fixed term P4 staff member and two international consultants. In November, OEV received approval for recruiting two additional impact evaluation staff members in 2020 at P2 (junior professional) and P3 (professional) level, and two additional consultants, bringing the total to six impact evaluation specialists by end of the year.

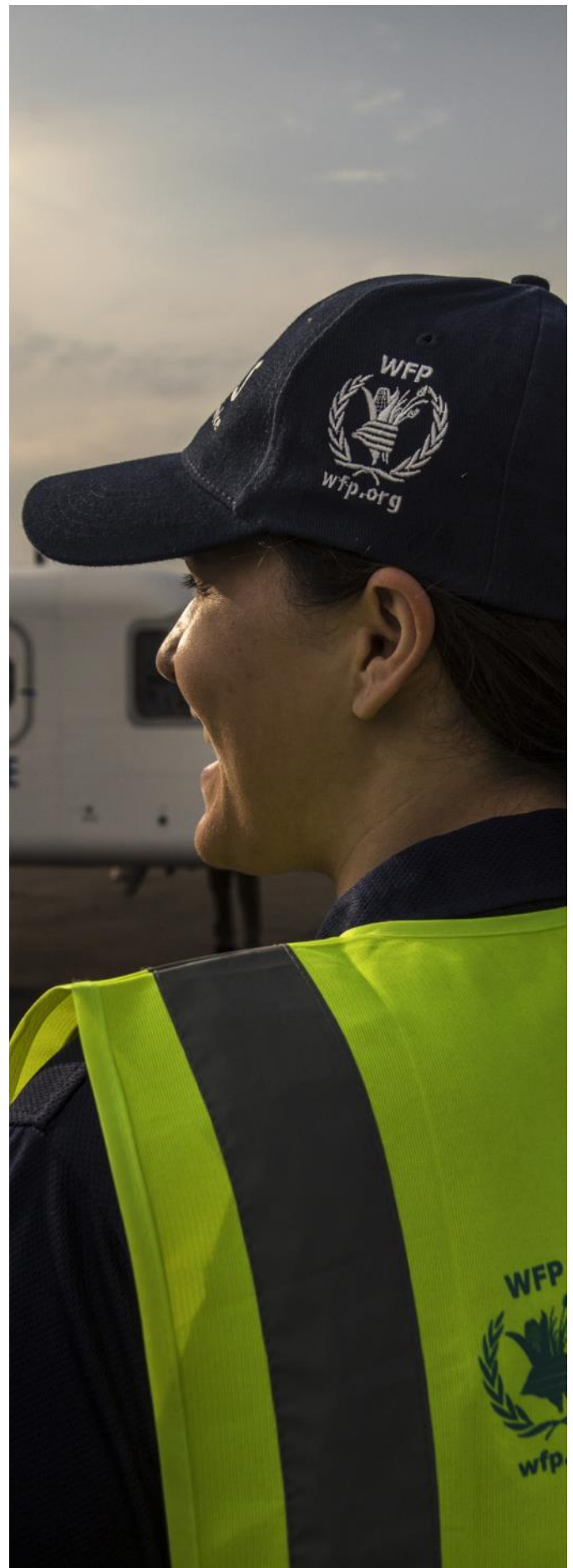
Financial Resources

OEV PSA funding available for impact evaluation in 2019 was approximately 1.1 million USD and will increase to 1.96 million USD in 2020, based on approved budgets.

OEV is actively seeking ways to diversify and increase financial resources available to impact evaluation. Internally, OEV is working to leverage financing from programme budgets. Each window evaluation is co-financed with the country office involved. OEV covers the cost of the management and technical support needed to deliver an impact evaluation, and the country offices commit to covering the cost of data collection.

In addition, OEV is actively involved in fundraising for impact evaluation windows and priority evaluations. In 2019, OEV established a trust fund to enable WFP to receive funding for impact evaluations. Commitments from Germany for priority resilience impact evaluation activities (Sahel, DRC, South Sudan) totalled 7.31 million USD for activities in the selected countries over the coming three to four years.

In sum, resources for impact evaluation in 2019 totalled 1.6 million USD, with just over 4.19 million USD available and scheduled for use in 2020.



WFP/Gabriela Vivacqua

Lessons Learned and Issues for Consideration in 2020



WFP/Hugh Rutherford

As we reflect over the last year, a few key lessons emerge which will be considered as we move forward in 2020:

1 DEMAND FOR IMPACT EVALUATIONS

There is already clear demand from country offices and HQ-based programme teams for impact evaluation evidence and support. In addition to the calls for expression of interest for each window, which garnered participation from several country offices, additional country offices have contacted OEV on an ad-hoc basis for support in understanding the requirements and opportunities for impact evaluation on their programming.

The window approach seems to be generating interest in priority areas. However, the decentralised nature of WFP operations means regional evaluation officers (REOs) and OEV are often unaware of opportunities in country offices until it is almost too late (after programme funding proposals are complete).

On the positive side, donor demand appears to be a powerful tool for stimulating WFP demand. The challenge for WFP will be meeting donor demand in countries where the impact evaluation may not be fully understood or where in-country capacities are limited.

2 WFP AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING

Related to demand is the awareness of offices about impact evaluation and support available in OEV. Many requests for support are either coming too late, after programme implementation has begun, or are for impact evaluations that are not feasible (e.g. too few clusters, etc.).

OEV will need to take a much more strategic approach to generating awareness about the new impact evaluation strategy and support available from OEV. 2019 highlighted the need to have a strong communication plan to ensure our partners – both internal and external, including donors, academics, and other practitioners – are well informed of our progress and involved in the use and dissemination of products. This will require an online presence with a dedicated website and regular engagement with other online platforms and blogs. In 2020, we aim to have a website by the end of the first quarter and will continue to strategize how best to dedicate our human resources to communication-related activities.

3 CAPACITY TO DELIVER IMPACT EVALUATION STRATEGY

To meet growing demand for impact evaluations WFP will need greater capacity. Shifting needs will be kept under close review as the function develops and additional windows commence. In 2019, our partnership with DIME was key for filling this gap in capacity, and more partnerships will be welcome in the future.

4 FUNDING MODEL

The co-funding model for impact evaluation windows was well-received by country offices. However, country offices were often unfamiliar with the costs of large-scale, household-level data collection which has led to some confusion and need for further consultations. Additionally, costs associated with data collection vary widely by country and within countries. As WFP gains more experience in the co-funding model, OEV and country officers will be better equipped to prepare adequate budgets.

In addition to increasing the capacity of WFP to accurately budget for impact evaluation costs, it is clear that some countries have more difficulty coming up with the funds needed. Smaller country programmes, and those implemented through government partners, can struggle to commit adequate resources towards data collection, which can lead to uneven coverage and over-representation of large programmes. In 2020, OEV will pilot the creation of a contingency fund for impact evaluation to support country offices that would otherwise struggle to afford them.

5 JOINT IMPACT EVALUATIONS

OEV is delivering impact evaluations in collaboration with UN partners involved in joint programmes in DRC and South Sudan. These joint evaluations highlight the need to encourage a common understanding of impact evaluation and effective avenues for coordination.

6 IE APPROACHES FOR CONTEXTS WHERE PROGRAMMING IS ADAPTIVE

WFP programmes are often delivering in rapidly evolving contexts, with limited evidence supporting theories of change, and where there are no universally accepted indicators and methods for measurement (e.g. resilience, empowerment). Delivering rigorous impact evaluations in these challenging contexts requires developing more adaptive approaches that can generate useful evidence at higher frequencies. These adaptive impact evaluations will also need to harness new and innovative ways of generating higher frequency outcome data from programmes.



WFP/Hugh Rutherford

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