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# **Thematic Evaluation of Cooperating Partnerships in the Eastern Africa Region 2016 - 2020**

**Decentralized Evaluation Report**

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# Key personnel for the evaluation

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# Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION AND EVALUATION FEATURES

This evaluation of Cooperating Partnerships in the Eastern Africa Region was commissioned by the World Food Programme (WFP) Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa in Nairobi (RBN) and covers the period from January 2016 to December 2020.

The evaluation focuses on WFP's relationships with its cooperating partners (CPs), which include international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations and Red Cross/Crescent Societies. The evaluation's geographic scope encompasses nine WFP country offices (COs) supported by RBN: Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda.

The objectives of the evaluation include both accountability and learning, with an emphasis on learning. Specifically, the evaluation will inform WFP's regional cooperating partnership strategy to meet its localization and Grand Bargain commitments; develop a better understanding of cooperating partnerships across the region; enable RBN to initiate a strategic dialogue around cooperating partnerships with COs during second-generation Country Strategic Plan (CSP) design; and inform RBN's gender-transformative approach to cooperating partnerships.

This evaluation addresses three main questions:

- How relevant are WFP cooperating partners and partnership management practices in countries supported by RBN?
- To what extent have (a) CO partnership management practices and (b) partners' capacities and performance been strengthened?
- What internal and external factors have influenced (a) CO partnership management practices and (b) partners' capacities and performance?

The evaluation team conducted in-depth reviews of Burundi, Kenya and Somalia and desk reviews for the other six countries. Data collection methods included: database mining, document and literature review (268 documents reviewed); 86 stakeholder interviews, and an online survey of WFP's CPs (213 survey respondents).

The main limitations of the evaluation were: limited availability of stakeholders and/or documentation in some countries; discrepancies in information on number and length of field-level agreements (FLAs) among COs; insufficient data on partnership performance and CP capacity; inconsistent use of terminology referring to GEWE-mandated organizations across data sources.

The main users and intended audience of the evaluation are the RBN and its COs, international and local CPs, host country governments and donors.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

The WFP RBN oversees 10 developing, low- and middle-income countries in the Eastern Africa region. With some of WFP's largest and most complex operations, RBN assists over 20 million people. In 2020, RBN received a budget of USD 2.9 billion and accounted for 38 per cent of WFP's global nutrition-specific beneficiaries. Most of this aid is implemented by its CPs. Between 2016-and 2020, WFP contracted more than 500 CPs in the Eastern Africa Region; most of these were local NGOs.

The Eastern Africa region is one of the most food-insecure regions of the world. Conflict, insecurity, displacement, climate-induced shocks and gender inequality have been key drivers of food insecurity. The countries in which RBN operates have diverse institutional contexts with governance structures that entail different levels and strategic orientations of WFP engagement, ranging from full deployment of emergency operations to strengthening government Emergency Preparedness and Response policy and institutional frameworks at national and sub-national levels.

In 2016, WFP embarked on a process of institutional reform to reorient the programmatic and administrative mechanisms for CPs in response to strategic shifts introduced as part of the WFP Integrated Road Map.

## **EVALUATION FINDINGS**

### **Relevance of WFP partners and partnership management practices**

The shifts in partnership management practices have largely responded to corporate directions to streamline and standardize CP management processes. All COs introduced standard operating procedures (SOPs) for FLA management, established Cooperating Partner Committees, and committed to increased digitization and automation of due diligence processes by beginning their use of the UN Partner Portal (UNPP).

WFP CP management practices and standards in the region have been aligned with principles of 'good' partnership; they have fostered collaboration guided by joint goals and characterized by transparency, accountability, and communication. Fewer efforts have focused on increasing strategic partnerships with CPs, capacity strengthening of CPs, and ensuring a greater focus on GEWE.

Gender and protection accountabilities in FLAs and other CP management tools represent a systematic effort to support gender-sensitive approaches to programming. WFP's integration of GEWE is most visibly operationalized through requirements about gender parity in partner organizations (staffing) and in the implementation of programme activities (among beneficiaries).

Overall, the mix of WFP CPs in the region is aligned with priorities outlined in CSPs and responds to evolving country contexts but does not yet reflect an intentional approach to engage more with local NGOs or with women's, women-led or GEWE-mandated organizations. WFP partnered with more local NGOs than international NGOs throughout 2016-2020, but channelled more funding to international NGOs. Although most COs have begun transitioning to multi-year FLAs, the continued use of short-term FLAs is not aligned with corporate directives or the needs of CPs, particularly local NGOs.

### **Strengthening of partnership management approaches and partner capacities and performance**

WFP's practices in CP selection have improved since 2016 and are seen as transparent, timely, and communicative. The introduction of the UNPP enhanced the clarity and efficiency of WFP's CP selection process. In other stages of the partnership management cycle, there have not yet been clear signs of improvements across all COs. Many WFP COs have partnered with the same CPs over a long period and have placed less emphasis on scoping prospective partners. Working with the same partners over time has allowed some COs to respond rapidly to emergency situations.

CPs in the region have mixed views on WFP's contracting processes. Although there is good communication during the negotiation process, efficiency has not improved, as seen in the continued prevalence of short-term FLAs and FLAs that fund specific project components. The content of FLAs is seen as rigid and not adapted to the specific needs of CPs and COs. COs have increased regular monitoring and feedback and have documented CP performance through the Partner Performance Evaluation (PPE) tool and CP evaluation reports, but the frequency with which WFP shares feedback varies across COs. Common challenges for CPs during project implementation include delays in financial processes, payment disbursements, and commodity deliveries.

CO efforts to strengthen CP management resulted in more standardized processes for CP selection, implementation and performance management, with less evidence of enhanced strategic engagement with CPs. Capacity strengthening activities were largely focused on strengthening CPs programmatic and operational capacity. WFP's contributions to capacity strengthening are not well documented and there is insufficient data to determine if there have been significant improvements in CP capacity or performance. Where introduced, Partnership Action Plans (PAPs) have not provided strategic guidance nor been regularly updated to orient CP management. There was no evidence that the shifts in CP management practices led to any unintended results on gender, equity and human rights.

### **Factors that influenced country office partnership management and partner capacities**

CP management practices are influenced by several external factors at the country level related to external funding, country governance, number of NGOs in the partnership landscape, and evolving operational contexts. Apart from the launch of the UNPP, a positive step towards harmonizing due diligence processes for CP selection and contracting among UN agencies at the CO-level, there were few other initiatives to improve collaboration across UN agencies in CP management practices. More opportunities for collaboration will be forthcoming in 2022.



The establishment of CP management teams and the commitment of senior personnel allowed many COs to better address the transactional and strategic aspects of managing partnerships, although striking the right balance between these aspects remains a challenge. Data management, digitization and NGO contracting tools and procedures represent key limitations for CP management. The absence of CO gender-related capacity, tools and guidance have limited how cooperating partnerships are used to support more gender-transformative programming.

The RBN has provided technical support and oversight of COs as well as guidance, learning opportunities and information sharing. The establishment of a dedicated CP management team at the RBN allowed the bureau to increase its focus on strategic aspects of CP management. WFP HQ has developed tools, templates and guidelines, and has provided support on their implementation.

Available data does not suggest a difference in the performance of international and local NGOs as CPs in terms of programme delivery. Nevertheless, interviewed stakeholders perceive that international NGOs are more likely to perform better than local NGOs.

## CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation found that by increasing standardization and placing greater emphasis on efficiency, WFP has improved some elements of CP management, especially related to risk management. WFP COs in the region made the most progress in introducing tools, templates and guidelines related to increased streamlining of business processes and standardization.

WFP has begun to shift away from seeing CPs as delivery agents/contractors towards seeing them as partners in country-level strategic planning to achieve Zero Hunger. However, CP management practices and tools still lag behind the strategic thinking about cooperating partnerships.

WFP has not had a clear approach to strengthening the capacity of CPs. The new generation of CSPs provides an opportunity to clarify this approach and its linkages to country capacity strengthening efforts.

WFP has made progress on Grand Bargain commitments overall, but has not yet clarified the implications of the localization agenda for cooperating partnerships and CP management in each country office.

There is still unmet potential to link CP management with WFP's more gender-transformative agenda, and current partnership management practices and tools do not encourage CPs to go beyond a focus on "numeric" gender equality towards more gender-transformative programming.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Strategic recommendations

**1. WFP should develop a strategy that contains an intentional approach to how WFP will meet its commitments to the localization agenda in the Eastern Africa region. The strategy should:**

1.1 Outline goals or targets towards partnering with more local NGOs and highlight the pathways for COs to achieve such goals even in contexts of emergency response

1.2 Include objectives that increase emphasis on capacity strengthening of CPs

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