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Synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations

(2011–2019)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WFP policies provide the normative framework within which the organization realizes its corporate goals as articulated in its successive strategic plans. The policies reflect WFP's dual humanitarian and development mandate.

This report synthesizes the findings of nine policy evaluations conducted between 2011 and 2019. It brings together evidence and lessons to inform ongoing consideration of the WFP policy cycle and function.

The evidence shows a currently diffuse and complex policy environment at WFP. A lack of policy coherence, coordination and prioritization risks both coverage gaps and confusion and competition between overlapping policy areas. Individual policies struggle to define both their relationships to other WFP policies and their relative importance to the organization, compounding difficulties for WFP employees on the ground.

This situation arises from systemic weaknesses in WFP's policy formulation and implementation arrangements, identified in policy evaluations conducted since 2011. Challenges include unsystematized approaches to designating policies and related documents; inconsistent use of formal classification categories for Executive Board submission; a lack of clear policy typology for different areas of work; and weaknesses in policy scrutiny and approval processes. Policy design quality has suffered from unclear standards and expectations for content, including weak evidence bases; gaps in internal logic; inconsistent and unclear use of terminology; and limited gender mainstreaming.

Despite extensive consultation on design and the production of guidance complementing policy documents, policy

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implementation in WFP over the period was constrained by a range of factors. These included limited leadership and management commitment; weak or lacking accountability frameworks; limited dissemination; and insufficient human and financial resources. Evaluations revealed policies that were not actively used across the organization, particularly below the headquarters level.

Internal management reporting on the implementation of evaluation recommendations lacks reliability. There is evidence that recommendations are taken seriously and acted upon by policy owners, however, although not always consistently or comprehensively. Recommendations on policy revision and updating, implementation mechanisms, building staff capacities, generating research and forming partnerships were all addressed to at least some degree. However, matters requiring more systemic change – such as knowledge management and accountability systems – have received less comprehensive treatment.

The lessons from this synthesis suggest that constructing an enabling policy environment within WFP would be facilitated by clarifying policy nomenclature; aligning the policy universe with WFP absorptive capacity; defining a common framework for policy content, geared to coherence; and robustly embedding accountability and resources for policy implementation. Policies also require more than a standalone document; they require full and visible corporate leadership, momentum and resources, as well as implementation-level guidance and comprehensive accountability.

To support the shift to an enabling policy environment, the synthesis includes three strategic and three operational recommendations. The strategic recommendations are that WFP clarify and confirm the policy cycle procedure, updating the 2011 policy formulation document; clarify policy governance and accountability procedures; and define the policy universe through an updated WFP policy framework, applying coherence as a key principle. The operational recommendations are that WFP adopt a policy building approach with clarified standards for staff; overhaul the current policy compendium; and review the processes for developing high-quality management responses to evaluations and ensuring follow-up on evaluation recommendations.

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INTRODUCTION

The WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021) sets out the role of WFP within the commitments of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It presents WFP's vision to lift the most vulnerable and marginalized people out of hunger, moving from saving lives to changing lives, focusing first on those in greatest need.

WFP policies provide the normative framework within which the organization aims to realize these goals. Policies cover WFP programmatic areas, corporate themes and cross-cutting concerns. They reflect WFP's dual mandate for humanitarian and development activity.

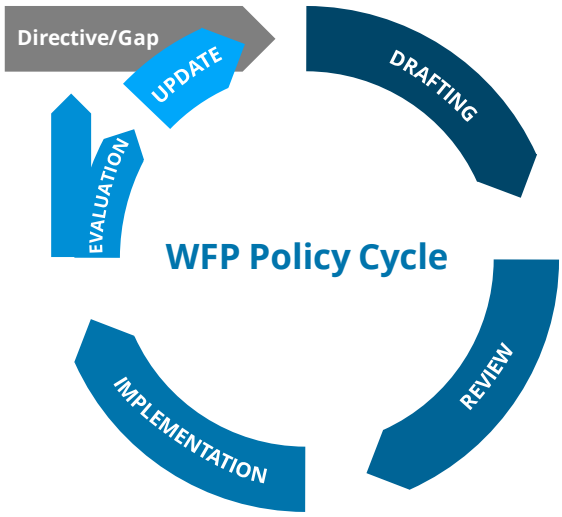
At a time of United Nations system reform and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Secretary-General's Decade of Action to deliver the global goals, and as WFP moves into its second generation of country strategic plans, WFP's policy function faces increasing demands. This synthesis brings together evidence and lessons from nine policy evaluations, conducted during the period 2011–2019, to help inform the organization's future

Executive Board in 2011,[3] new WFP policies may be initiated when:

- WFP enters into new areas of work;
- a gap in existing policies is identified; or
- the changing context or directives from governing bodies require a policy to be reviewed and reissued.

The 2011 policy formulation document presents the WFP policy cycle, which follows a path from policy initiation through to policy drafting, review, implementation and evaluation (figure 1):

FIGURE 1: WFP POLICY CYCLE



Policy governance – Under the 2011 policy formulation document, policies are submitted to the Executive Board according to three classifications, as follows:

- For approval: Policy papers prepared following a directive from the General Assembly or ECOSOC that bring WFP

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