



IMPACT EVALUATION

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

2021 in Review



**World Food
Programme**

**SAVING
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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 must know which interventions work best in each area we operate. To do this, we must both generate and follow the evidence.

In 2021, WFP completed the pilot phase of its Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019–2026). The strategy has an explicit aim of supporting the organization to use rigorous impact evaluation evidence to inform policy and programme decisions, optimize interventions and provide thought leadership to global efforts to achieve Zero Hunger.

The pilot phase enabled WFP to test the level of demand and start developing approaches to support and deliver impact evaluations. It also provided the space needed to explore operational models for impact evaluations that meet organizational needs.

In 2021, the Office of Evaluation (OEV) commissioned an external review of the WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy. Overall, the review confirms that WFP can and should play a leading role in generating impact evaluation evidence to support organizational learning and contribute to global evidence. The review also highlighted challenges to be addressed as the organization moves beyond the pilot phase.



WFP established the Strategic Advisory Panel (SAP) to guide its efforts to build capacity and deliver impact evaluations. The advice of the SAP to inform WFP's response to the 2021 review recommendations is important as we move towards institutionalizing impact evaluation.

As Director of Evaluation, I am pleased to share the 2021 Annual Report of the Strategic Advisory Panel, which captures progress to date, lessons learned from piloting our strategy and key issues for consideration in 2022.

Andrea Cook
Director of Evaluation

Review of the pilot phase (2019-2021) of the WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026)

In 2021, the Office of Evaluation (OEV) commissioned IOD PARC to conduct the 'Review of the pilot phase (2019-2021) of the WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026)', hereafter referred to as 'the review'. The review assessed progress towards the strategy's objectives, and to what extent WFP had established the structures and capacity required to deliver the strategy.

Overall, the review found that the strategy is a highly relevant, important and timely initiative by WFP. The review also identified substantial demand for more impact evaluations in WFP, and provided a basis to further develop the capacity needed to meet this demand.

FINDINGS

Two years into the WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy (IES), the review found that:

The IES is proving resilient and there is considerable positive feedback and evidence of progress.

Most of the respondents interviewed for the review regarded the IES as a highly relevant, important and timely initiative by WFP.

What is also clear is that there is substantial demand for more impact evaluations in WFP.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is still too early to see completed impact evaluations, but progress has been made in most of the key workstreams.

A demand-led model for generating impact evaluation evidence requires intensive support from OEV to make it work and to overcome the practical and technical challenges involved in impact evaluations.

To make the IES sustainable, and to meet the growing global demand for WFP's impact evaluation evidence, internal capacity is emerging as a key prerequisite for success.

CONSIDERATIONS

The review highlights the following areas for consideration in the future:

- ▶ Further refining a hybrid model which combines external expertise and in-house capacity, in which WFP's in-house impact evaluation specialists provide a strong and confident lead and draw on a range of external partners.

- ▶ Accelerating WFP's capacity building work to allow the organization to respond to latent and actual demand for more impact evaluations.
- ▶ Building links to researchers in developing countries and the global south.
- ▶ Broadening the methods used to help answer the 'why' question, to provide greater contextual knowledge and understanding of programme implementation.
- ▶ Improving awareness of the IES through strong communications work.
- ▶ Ensuring continuity and sustainability are fully embedded and institutionalized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Five specific recommendations are put forward by the review:

Recommendation 1. As part of its overall approach to building internal capacity, including a strong OEV team in headquarters, WFP should consider having a small number of impact evaluation specialists as focal points in regional evaluation units. Focal points could also contribute to other evaluation-related activities in their units. Enhanced synergies with regional VAM/RAM teams should also be explored.

Recommendation 2. OEV has already developed a range of incipient partnerships but should now develop a clear plan for broadening its partnerships for delivery of impact evaluations. As the range of impact evaluations increases, there will be a need to draw on expertise in other areas and windows which no single partner can provide.

Recommendation 3. The windows concept is proving its worth and is a powerful way to ensure quality, however, OEV should consider how it can be applied in a more flexible way, using a greater range of methods.

Recommendation 4. Alongside broadening partnerships for delivery in Recommendation 2, OEV should proactively build strategic partnerships in other aspects set out in the IES and spearhead more systematic engagement on impact evaluations within the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

Recommendation 5. Given the need to raise awareness of the IES and looking ahead to when impact evaluations are completed and published, OEV should prioritize communications aspects of implementing the IES, including work on how impact evaluations will be used, well in advance of when they are published.

Strategic Advisory Panel Annual Meeting

22 February 2022

PANEL MEMBERS

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

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

Marie Gaarder, Executive Director, 3ie

Robert Darko Osei, Associate Professor, ISSER, University of Ghana

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

WFP PARTICIPANTS

Andrea Cook, Director of Evaluation, WFP

Sarah Longford, Deputy Director of Evaluation, WFP

Jonas Heirman, Evaluation Officer (Impact Evaluation), WFP

Felipe Dunsch, Impact Evaluation Officer, WFP

Hanna Paulose, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer (Impact Evaluation), WFP

Simone Lombardini, Impact Evaluation Specialist, WFP

Kristen McCollum, Impact Evaluation Analyst, WFP

Ola El Toukhi, Impact Evaluation Analyst, WFP

Nidhila Adusumalli, Impact Evaluation Analyst, WFP

Kriti Malhotra, Regional Field Coordinator for Impact Evaluation, WFP

INTRODUCTION

The Annual Meeting of the Strategic Advisory Panel (SAP) reviews progress made in implementing WFP's Impact Evaluation Strategy (2019-2026). The agenda had two main topics: the first was a discussion on progress made in 2021, and the second responded to recommendations in the 2021 Review of the Impact Evaluation Strategy (IES). Below is a summary of the two discussions.

2021 YEAR IN REVIEW:

► *Overall progress in 2021:* Panel members welcomed WFP's continued progress in the design and delivery of rigorous impact evaluations. They were encouraged that many impact evaluations are moving from the design to implementation phase. Panel members questioned whether there had been any early positive or negative findings and related opportunities for learning from data collected during ongoing impact evaluations.

OEV highlighted how the major challenges encountered so far are related to programme implementation and monitoring capacities. Rigorous impact evaluations require programmes to monitor the support provided to specific households or individuals, over a period long enough to measure changes in well-being. This type of programme implementation and monitoring represents a new way of working and is a challenge for many WFP offices and staff.

The decision to introduce a pilot phase into the new [School-based Programmes Impact Evaluation Window](#) is designed to enable WFP country offices and partners to develop their capacity and test tools before evaluating full-scale programmes.

OEV highlighted how additional data collection methods, such as key informant interviews, are providing valuable information for examining implementation process questions and support course corrections during programme implementation.

► *Demand-led versus global evidence priorities:* Panel members questioned how well the evidence priorities expressed by country offices

are aligned with global evidence needs. They suggested that questions related to operational issues such as procurement models are probably better examined using non-experimental evaluation methods.

OEV agreed and highlighted that the windows aim to balance both global evidence needs and country office questions, and these needs may not always be fully aligned. For WFP's school-based programme impact evaluations, the plan is to explore more process-related questions during the pilot phases, and then shift the focus towards child health and education outcomes during the scale-up of interventions.

- ▶ *Within and cross-window synthesis opportunities:* Panel members were struck by the range of interventions and questions within and across windows and reflected on how many of the impact evaluations within each window were able to answer the same questions (see [Annex 1](#) for window summary tables). There was also recognition that similar intervention modalities are present in different windows which could enable combining data and findings from across multiple windows.
- ▶ *External visibility and communicating what WFP learns during impact evaluations before completion:* Panel members felt that much of the progress and lessons learned during WFP's impact evaluations are not easily accessible to external stakeholders and recommended that significant additional value could be gained from impact evaluation data, including baseline and high-frequency data, etc. if OEV were to broaden the methods of analysis used.

OEV explained how data and evidence are already feeding back into programmes. In Mali, the baseline data collected was used to target COVID-19 support. In Mali, Niger, Rwanda and South Sudan high-frequency data is used to monitor participation rates and inform implementation adjustments for the subsequent programme cycle. In Kenya, WFP is improving beneficiary monitoring based on experiences in Rwanda and El Salvador.

- ▶ *Connecting impact evaluations to wider monitoring and evaluation activities:* Panel members highlighted the importance of ensuring that impact evaluations utilize and contribute to country office monitoring systems. A recommendation was made that building impact evaluations into routine monitoring and evaluation processes could reduce costs, increase country office buy-in and help ensure sustainability. There was also a discussion on how impact evaluations fit into WFP's wider evaluation function and relate to other types of evaluation.

OEV explained that within WFP's updated Evaluation Policy and new Corporate Evaluation Strategy there is a much more explicit commitment to ensure coherence between all types of evaluation, and an increase in focus on evidence use as a clear objective.

- ▶ *Embedding cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis into impact evaluations:* The Panel welcomed recent progress in collecting baseline and high-frequency data. The Panel recommended that more be done to analyse the cost-effectiveness of interventions.

OEV agreed and highlighted that because WFP country offices use a wide range of procurement modalities and field-level agreements to deliver programmes, it is challenging to standardize any unit of cost. OEV will work with country offices to explore the availability and usefulness of cost data and offer additional guidance and support. Where possible, OEV will step up efforts to use cost data collected to conduct cost-effectiveness analyses.

- ▶ *Engaging country governments:* The Panel enquired about the extent to which OEV engages with national researchers in its ongoing impact evaluations. OEV confirmed that this is a future priority that has so far been limited to the selection of field coordinators.

OEV hopes to engage in a more in-depth process of identifying the most effective avenues for both developing and collaborating with evaluation and research capacity either in-country or regionally in areas where WFP operates.

REVIEW OF THE PILOT PHASE (2019-2021) OF THE WFP IMPACT EVALUATION STRATEGY (2019-2026)

The second agenda item responded to recommendations in the 2021 Review of the Impact Evaluation Strategy. OEV presented all the recommendations and suggested responses, before opening the floor for feedback:

- ▶ *General feedback from SAP members:* Panel members highlighted that there appears to be a disconnect between review findings and the recommendations. Overall, the review is positive about progress, but then recommends additional areas for future development. Many of the recommendations are simply good principles, but do not connect directly to the findings.

OEV agreed and clarified that the review confirmed demand for impact evaluation in WFP. The recommendations are taken as areas for continuing development, and the WFP response to the review sets out incremental steps for the continued strengthening of WFP's impact evaluations.

- ▶ *Recommendation 1. As part of its overall approach to building internal capacity, including a strong OEV team in headquarters, WFP should consider having a small number of impact evaluation specialists as focal points in regional evaluation units.*

Panel members indicated that OEV should reflect carefully on what can be decentralized, and the capacity needed to do this effectively.

- ▶ *Recommendation 2. OEV has already developed a range of incipient partnerships but should now develop a clear plan for broadening its partnerships for delivery of impact evaluations, beyond its current reliance on DIME (the World Bank Development Impact Evaluation), in support*

- ▶ *Recommendation 3. The windows concept is proving its worth and is a powerful way to ensure quality, but OEV should consider how it can be applied more flexibly using a greater range of methods.*

The Panel members recognized the potential additional value that could be generated by using different methods of analysis during and after impact evaluations. However, they also warned WFP that caution is needed, and there is a risk that trying to do too many different types of analysis within an impact evaluation could reduce its quality and distract from the core design.

- ▶ *Recommendation 4. Alongside broadening partnerships for delivery in Recommendation 2, OEV should proactively build strategic partnerships in other aspects set out in the IES and spearhead more systematic engagement on impact evaluations within UNEG.*

Panel members were unclear about the purpose of the recommendation. In general, they welcomed efforts to develop partnerships; however, they questioned whether UNEG in particular has a strong interest or focus on impact evaluation.

- ▶ *Recommendation 5. Given the need to raise awareness of the IES and looking ahead to when impact evaluations are completed and published, OEV should prioritize communications aspects of implementing the IES, including work on how impact evaluations will be used, well in advance of when they are published.*

The Panel welcomed the recommendation to more actively share lessons learned during implementation. They also highlighted that building buy-in for impact evaluation is an iterative process that requires time and will need to combine strategic communications with space for learning.

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