



TECHNICAL NOTE FOR PLANNING AND CONDUCTING EVALUATIONS DURING COVID-19

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the implementation of quarantine measures worldwide, including travel restrictions, hence impacting WFP programmes and evaluations. In some cases, stakeholders' information/ evidence needs may change due to the evolving interventions in response to the crisis, which might lead to changes in the evaluation scope and key evaluation questions. Furthermore, in many countries, evaluations cannot for the time being rely on field missions and face-to-face interviews, affecting methodology and data collection options. Data collection and any related evaluation activities involving direct person-to-person contact should follow host governments directives and guidelines.

1.1. Purpose

the objective of this internal note is to support decision-making processes about ongoing and planned evaluations (centralized and decentralized), ensure transparency and consistency of approaches, and clarity on the principles that should guide evaluation management during the currently constrained circumstances for evaluations other than impact evaluations. For ongoing and future impact evaluations, OEV is working to align plans with any changes in programme timelines or interventions. OEV aims to respond with flexibility in the design of impact evaluations, while expanding its capacity to collect data and analyse the impacts of future emergency responses.

Specifically, this operational note aims to:

- Clarify and reaffirm the key overarching **principles** that should guide WFP evaluation work in the context of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the related WFP Corporate Emergency Response;
- Present the main **evaluability considerations** that should inform COVID-related evaluation planning adjustments;
- Outline possible scenarios for **adjusting the planning and conduct** of evaluations within WFP in the context of the global COVID 19 pandemic (see figure 1 below);
- Clarify the **minimum standards and features** required for remote evaluations as opposed to desk studies.

Figure 1: Scenarios for adjusting evaluations

	POSTPONEMENT	REMOTE EVALUATION	FROM EVALUATION TO DESK STUDY	CANCELLATION
SCENARIOS				

1.2. Target users

- WFP Country Offices (COs) as well as in Regional Evaluation Units working on adjusting the planning and / or ongoing conduct of Decentralized Evaluations (DEs).
- Evaluation Officers in the Office of Evaluation (OEV) to inform the adjustments to ongoing and planned Centralized Evaluations.

1.3. Overarching principles

The overarching principles and ethical considerations presented below do not replace the more comprehensive set of norms and standards (including ethical) that guide the practice of evaluation in the UN (UNEG, 2016, 2008) nor the humanitarian principles to which WFP Strategic Plan (2017-2021) reaffirms WFP's commitment. They are highlighted to orient evaluation decision making processes in the current corporate emergency situation.

- **Adaptive management and decision-making:** It is very difficult to predict how the COVID-19 pandemic will evolve across the world and how it will affect local economies and WFP operations in different countries. This implies the need to be responsive to changes and adapt in managing evaluations. Evaluation Managers, in close collaboration and communication with the Evaluation Team Leaders and the Regional Evaluation Unit (in the case of DEs) should continuously monitor and take decisions based on the evolving global, regional and country-level contexts and their implications for the safety and well-being of those involved in the evaluation as well as for the evaluation methodology and budget¹ and team requirements.
- **Do-no-harm and beneficence²:** Explicit and systematic consideration of risks and benefits throughout the evaluation process is required. Decisions about evaluation data collection timing and approaches should aim to minimize exposure to risk (including of contracting COVID-19) for individuals (women, men, girls and boys), communities, WFP and partners' employees who would be involved in the evaluation as interviewees/informants as well as national and international evaluators.³ Care should be taken not to off-loading risks to national consultants in this context.
- **Utility:** Evaluations require substantial investment in terms of time and financial resources; and, even where mitigated, they can lead to disruption and exposure to risks⁴. Therefore, the decision to go ahead with an evaluation should be taken only if the benefits expected in terms of supporting decision-making processes, learning and accountability are likely to outweigh the investment in time, human and financial resources. The COVID-19 crisis is already putting a significant strain on human resources and will have important financial implications which need to be considered.
- **"Good-enough" approach:** Such approach will entail balancing the principles of evaluation credibility with utility and timeliness and considerations for the operational constraints. Decisions over the evaluation approach and design should be guided by the need to make trade-off between: **(i)** meeting minimum standards in adherence to UNEG Norms and Standards to produce credible findings and recommendations, **(ii)** ensuring that the evaluation is timely to feed into planning and decision-making processes; and **(iii)** considering what is practical and feasible in the current context.

¹ As the evaluation evolves, the budget may need to be scaled down (e.g. in case travel expenses are no longer required) or up (e.g. to cover for more expensive remote data collection instruments such as mobile surveys using voice responses).

² Closely connected to Do-No-Harm, beneficence entails striving to do good for people and the planet while minimizing harms arising from evaluation as an intervention. It is one of the newer principles included in the forthcoming revised UNEG Guidelines on Ethics.

³ Duty of care considerations are relevant here as they refer to the requirement for an organization to manage health, safety and security of its staff from an occupational health and well-being perspective.

⁴ UNEG (2008) Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation, para 8.

2. Evaluability Assessment

The Evaluation Manager in consultation with the key evaluation users should conduct a quick evaluability assessment across different dimensions to help decide whether the planned or on-going evaluation should be postponed, adapted and turned into a remote evaluation, turned into a desk study or be cancelled (as spelled out in more details in sections 4 and 5). This assessment includes looking at how important is the evaluation at this point in time; what would be the implications of postponing or cancelling it; what data is currently available and/or what additional data could be collected remotely?

This assessment should ideally take place at the Planning stage and also be (re)considered and validated at the Preparation and Inception stage. Based on the evaluability assessment, and if the decision is made to proceed with the evaluation, the evaluation, and more particularly the TORs and the inception report, will need to be adjusted in terms of evaluation objectives (all might not be achievable), evaluation scope (it will likely be modified), evaluation questions; evaluation methods and approach (interviews with communities and field observations are unlikely to take place; data availability should be strongly factored in); timeline; evaluators' profile; and budget needs.

This assessment should also consider the potential extension of the UNDAF or UNSDCF cycle by the UN Country Team, and the related extension of WFP Country Strategic Plan. This will directly result in a shift in the timing of the Country Strategic Plan Evaluation (CSPE) and may also influence the timing of the DE. Complementarity with other exercises, such as audit processes, should also be systematically reviewed.

Table 1: Evaluability considerations

PERTINENCE: UTILITY / SENSITIVITY	DATA
<p>1. Utility: Are the benefits expected in terms of supporting decision-making processes, learning and accountability likely to outweigh the investment in time, human and financial resources? What is the latest possible timing of the evaluation, so that it comes in time to inform the preparation of the new CSP? Is there flexibility for postponing the evaluation without undermining its utility?</p> <p>2. Ethical issues and possible negative consequences: Is it possible to address the evaluation questions without putting people at risk? Consider the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you anticipate substantial harms for key informants, evaluators, the broader community, or the environment resulting from their participation in this evaluation? If so, can mitigation measures be put in place? • Have you established that the evaluation must stop where mitigation of harms is not possible? • Are protection measures or protocols needed (e.g. relevant supports, referrals, protections and services for both vulnerable populations and evaluation personnel)? • Will the evaluation pose an acceptable burden on staff and cooperating partners that are critically needed elsewhere? <p>3. Risks to WFP's evaluation reputation and relationships: Do we have a commitment to a donor or the WFP Executive Board to conduct the evaluation and, if so, can it be re-negotiated? What will the consequences be of changing the scope or timing of the evaluation, or cancelling the evaluation altogether for WFP relationship with its main partners? Is there a risk to WFP's reputation?</p> <p>4. Resource constraints: Have the resources originally earmarked for the activities that were expected to be evaluated been redirected towards other interventions under the Covid response? If so, the original scope of the evaluation becomes irrelevant. Will the evaluation budget still be available if the evaluation was to be postponed to next quarters/year? Is the budget adequate to conduct the evaluation remotely? What is the likelihood that the planned evaluation will have to be cancelled anyway? In this light, is it worth investing in preparations and inception?</p>	<p>1. Availability of secondary data⁵: To what extent can the required information/data can be found in existing documents/datasets? How reliable and up-to-date is that information/data? How critical is the information that we might not find in existing documents or that can only be gathered through observation, interviews or discussions?</p> <p>2. Access to internal and external stakeholders and feasibility of remote data collection: What are the effects of movement restrictions for international and national personnel (official restrictions but also in light of safety)? If not, to what extent required information/data can be obtained through remote data collection (online interviews, questionnaires, emails)? Can we count on in-country partners to provide us the required information? How well do remote connections work in the capital and in other areas of the country? Would remote data collection expose certain populations to potential protection or safety risks? Which internal and external stakeholders/informants will likely not be reachable remotely and what will the consequences be on credibility and legitimacy of the evaluation? To what extent can we rely on national consultants?</p> <p>3. Data relevance: To what extent is the pre-COVID information/ evidence relevant to formulate conclusions and recommendations on a new intervention given the changes caused by COVID? How illustrative is during-COVID field data collection to provide findings on the intervention implementation overall? Have stakeholder's information needs changed and require updating evaluation questions?</p>

⁵ As of March 2020, many Country Offices have put on hold process and outcome monitoring due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



3. Evaluation Decision Making Tool

The evaluability assessment as explained above should provide clear insights as to whether the utility of the evaluation would outweigh its costs and risks under the current circumstances. The main factors that should guide the decision on the way forward with a given evaluation are the time sensitivity of the evaluation, the availability of quality secondary data sources, and the remote access to evaluation stakeholders (including associated risks). The decision will also vary depending on the stage in which the evaluation currently is.

Table 2: Decision Making Tool

Evaluation phases	Evaluation is time critical	High quality secondary data sources available	Adequate remote access to stakeholders	THEN consider the following scenarios
Planning or preparation stages	Yes	Yes	Yes	➤ Conduct a remote evaluation
		Yes	No	➤ Convert the evaluation into a desk study
		No		➤ Cancel the evaluation
	No		➤ Postpone the evaluation and follow the initial modality once the situation evolves	
Inception stage	Yes	Yes	Yes	➤ Conduct a remote inception phase ➤ Closely monitor the situation to also possibly conduct main data collection remotely
		Yes	No	➤ Convert the evaluation into a desk study or explore other alternative exercises ⁶
		No		➤ Cancel the evaluation or explore other alternative exercises
	No	Yes	Yes	➤ Conduct a remote inception phase ➤ Postpone the main data collection phase
		Yes	No	➤ Postpone the evaluation and follow the initial modality once the situation evolves
		No		➤ Postpone the evaluation and follow the initial modality once the situation evolves
Main data collection stage	Yes	Yes	Yes	➤ Conduct remote main data collection
		Yes	No	➤ Convert the evaluation into a desk study or explore other alternative exercises
		No		➤ Cancel the evaluation
	No		➤ Postpone main data collection phase	
Analysis and reporting stage	Yes		➤ Business as usual for analysis and drafting of the report ➤ Adopt a remote approach for validation/ learning workshops/event	
	No		➤ Business as usual for analysis and drafting of the report ➤ Postpone the validation/learning workshops/events	

⁶ Alternative exercises to be explored to contribute to programme decision-making and meet some of the accountability and learning needs include [reviews](#) or [lessons learned](#) among others.

4. Proceeding with evaluations during COVID-19 emergency: Scenarios at a Glance

Evaluations for which evaluators have already completed field data collection can largely continue as planned. However, for evaluations in planning, preparation, inception or data collection stages, another scenario will need to be agreed on, which could be remote evaluation or desk study (see minimum standards for both scenario in section 6). Alternatively, the evaluation could be postponed or cancelled.

Table 3: Scenarios at a glance

IMPLICATIONS/ REQUIREMENTS

LIMITATIONS



POSTPONEMENT

- This assumes that despite being postponed the evaluation will still be timely to inform decision-making;
- Review evaluation plans, timeline, budget and revise/extend the contract with the evaluation company / consultants (if previously signed); revisions to be the budget should be explicitly documented and processed through a PO revision.
- Monitor potential CSP extensions, as required;
- Inform donor / EB / stakeholders, as required.

- Backlog of evaluations in 2021;
- Consultants / Firms contract clauses might not include an adequate level of flexibility in terms of mission and data collection timelines.



REMOTE EVALUATION

FIELD INCEPTION + REMOTE DATA COLLECTION

- The data collection will be undertaken remotely, involving internal and external stakeholders;
- Review available information and data;
- Contact key stakeholders to identify any changes on information needs which would lead to more relevant evaluation questions;
- Assess the feasibility of remote data collection methods; carefully select remote data collection methods at community level. Additional skillsets (e.g. language, survey skills) likely to be needed;



- Already undertaken pre-COVID country missions, e.g. during the inception stage of an evaluation, combined with remote data collection or a desk review during the evaluation stage;
- Intentions discussed during the pre-COVID mission will need to be revisited and shared in an up to date inception report.

REMOTE INCEPTION + FIELD DATA COLLECTION

- Clarify measures and safeguards to minimize stakeholders' exposure to risk of COVID infection and review ethics implications.
- Review evaluation plans, timeline, budget and revise contract with the evaluation company (if previously signed);
- Avoid organizing courtesy or protocol meetings.



- Following a remote inception phase, the team can conduct field data collection after travel restrictions are lifted;
- In view of the uncertain development of COVID 19, this scenario can probably not be decided on ex-ante but can be identified as a possibility on-the-go.

- Risk of limited engagement / buy-in from programme teams and stakeholders;
- Connectivity breakdown;
- Possible bias in information collected as no possibility for direct observation, unequal access to remote connections etc.;
- Uncertainty around timelines for decision-making processes.



CONVERT EVALUATION INTO A DESK STUDY

- This scenario is to be considered where access to stakeholders and remote data collection are not possible, and an evaluability assessment concluded that there is sufficient evidence available from secondary sources;
- This requires a systematic review and analysis of available evidence. This should lead to a reduction of the budget/LTA/consultants contracts (if already signed) that will be explicitly documented. In the case of a LTA, this will require a PO reduction to free up resources;
- The evidence generated will not be as strong and credible as with an evaluation; this should be communicated clearly to stakeholders and expectations managed accordingly.

- Less credibility to meet accountability objectives;
- Backlog of evaluations;
- Risk of funding being reprogrammed;
- Not delivering on a donor evaluation requirement.



CANCELLATION

- This scenario applies in case evaluation principles and evaluability conditions cannot be met, no alternative evaluation methods apply and/ or CO has been able to demonstrate not having absorption capacity and evaluation mission hosting capabilities to support the evaluation;
- The decision to cancel must be formally endorsed by Director of Evaluation (CE) or by CD (DE);
- For evaluations required by a donor or joint evaluations: liaise with the donor(s) and/or other commissioning agencies to ensure that all stakeholders agree with the cancellation.
- If the evaluation team was already contracted through a LTA, the contract will need to be terminated. See FAQ #7.

- Backlog of evaluations;
- Risk of funding being reprogrammed;
- Not delivering on a donor evaluation requirement;
- Reduced ability to build new CSP on evidence.

5. Minimum requirements of Remote Evaluations vs Desk Studies

Table 4: Requirements of remote evaluations and desk studies

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS	REMOTE EVALUATION	DESK STUDY
Access to a comprehensive and reliable set of secondary data	<p>There should be a comprehensive and reliable set of secondary data that can be used to address the main questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WFP corporate policy and guidance documents; • Operational documents (CSP or project document, budgets, mission reports, distribution reports, SITREPs for emergencies, coordination meetings NFR, CO reporting and planning documents); • VAM and Monitoring system databases (VAM, mVAM, COMET and complaints and feedback mechanisms) and regular reports; • Cooperating partners' related information (lists of partners by activity and location, FLA, MOU, field mission reports); • Previous evaluations, reviews, lessons learned and any other type of evaluative exercise; • Evaluation and Audit Management responses and updates on their implementation; • External literature (government policies, UNSDCF, inter-agency appeals, etc.). 	
Additional data collection	<p>Remote access to internal and external stakeholders to collect additional data through interviews, surveys, focus group discussions etc... and address gaps identified through the review of secondary data integrate systematically external perspectives.</p>	
Impartiality	<p>Remote evaluations must be conducted by independent evaluators.</p>	<p>Desk studies may be conducted by independent evaluators but this is not a formal requirement.</p>
Norms and Standards	<p>Remote evaluations follow the United Nation Evaluation Group Norms and standards.</p>	<p>No international standards applied although good practice in terms of triangulation is recommended.</p>
Governance mechanism	<p>An Evaluation Reference Group is established to ensure that the perspectives of different stakeholders are systematically considered and contribute to a transparent evaluation process.</p>	<p>No formal ERG required, but it is advisable to have the draft report reviewed/ validated by WFP staff and key external stakeholders including cooperating partner where possible.</p>
Data analysis methods	<p>Requires application of systematic, comprehensive and transparent analytical methods throughout the process, including identifying data sources, collecting and analyzing data triangulating across multiple data sources, and consulting stakeholders.</p>	<p>The same standard in terms of systematic analysis and triangulation should be applied with the caveat that there will be inherent data gaps that this limit the strength of the evidence.</p>
Publication	<p>The final evaluation report must be published on WFP website.</p>	<p>There is no formal requirement to publish the desk study report although it is recommended to support accountability.</p>

6. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

- 1. What are the minimum quality standards for a credible evaluation?** Independence and Impartiality remain important at any time. Triangulation of reliable, valid data sources needs to be ensured, either through data triangulation, evaluator triangulation, theory triangulation or methodological triangulation. Limitations need to be clearly detailed. Findings need to detail the weight of evidence available to sustain them.
- 2. What are the remote data collection methods and tools available?** There are diverse types of remote data collection methods, ranging from phone interviews, virtual focus group discussions, web-based surveys, text messages, to remote sensing and third-party data collection, among others. The implications of using remote data collection methods need to be carefully assessed even where these are possible (e.g. partiality due to access to mobile phones by women/men, literacy rates, protection concerns in certain conflict zones). For more detailed information on them and the criteria to assess the most suitable option, please see the [note on Monitoring Recommendations for COVID19 response](#) and mVAM guidelines.
- 3. Can I cancel an evaluation?** An evaluation can be cancelled if the evaluability assessment concludes that all other options (postponing, remote evaluation, turning the evaluation into a desk study) are not feasible/advisable. The decision to cancel should be made by the Director of Evaluation for centralized evaluations and by the Director of the commissioning office in the case of decentralized evaluations. For evaluations specifically required by a donor or a joint evaluation, agreement with the donor(s) and/or other commissioning agencies needs to be ensured first. Consultants / Firms contract clauses should be carefully reviewed. If the evaluation is cancelled before any call for expression of interest or request for proposal was launched, there is no legal/ procurement/ HR implications. If a call for expression of interest or request for proposal was launched, firms should be informed of the cancellation to ensure transparent communication. If instead the evaluation team was already contracted, refer to question 7 below.
- 4. Is there a maximum number of evaluations that I can postpone?** No, but it is important to adequately assess the risk of backlog evaluations and assess the capacity to engage in multiple evaluation processes at a later stage.
- 5. Can the contract with an evaluation firm be extended?** Yes, if the evaluation firm can conduct the evaluation at a later stage and if the termination date of the funds used allow for such extension. The Procurement Unit should be involved in order to obtain the relevant approval and extend the contract. If the firm is unable to conduct the evaluation at a later stage or if the TDD funds expire this year, then the contract should be terminated (see question 7 below).
- 6. Can an evaluation team recruited to conduct an evaluation be the same to conduct a desk study?** If the evaluation team is already contracted and the evaluation is turned into a desk study, this should be agreed upon with the firm and the contract should be revised to reflect the change in the deliverables (from an evaluation to a desk study) as well as a likely reduction of the budget. As this will require a revision to the PO, the Procurement Unit will need to be involved.
- 7. Can the contract with an evaluation firm be terminated?** Discuss first with the evaluation firm to explain the challenges faced and why the evaluation should be cancelled as opposed to being postponed, continued remotely or turned into a desk study. The firm can request a termination of the contract on the basis of Force Majeure (Article 12 of the UN General Terms and Conditions "Force Majeure; Other changes in conditions"). Another option is to terminate the contract amicably, with no liability nor claim from either party. Such termination involves waiving any right for WFP to claim damages (if any). As each contract and country context

should be analysed on a case-by-case basis, Legal, Procurement and the Office of Evaluation should be consulted and their approval should be sought.⁷

- 8. Can an allocation from the Contingency Evaluation Fund be used next year in case the decentralized evaluation is postponed?** Yes, it can be used for the next year with prior agreement from OEV. COs and REOs are requested to proactively share information on revised timeline with the DE Helpdesk and CEF Secretariat.
- 9. Can evaluation budgets be reprogrammed for other activities?** The reallocation of resources originally set aside for an evaluation should be discussed in the context of the evaluability assessment. Evaluation budgets can only be reprogrammed if the evaluability assessment concluded that the only option was to cancel the evaluation; this is subject to donor's agreement if the funds were earmarked for a specific evaluation.
- 10. What budget would I need to conduct the evaluation remotely?** Costs vary depending on the alternative means of data collection selected but the reduction in travel costs could offset some of those additional costs.
- 11. Should the evaluation timeline be extended considering the Covid-19 crisis?** Given the focus on the Covid-19 response, WFP employees and stakeholders have limited capacity to engage in the evaluation process. Hence, the evaluation timeline should be reviewed to provide more time to consult with stakeholders at inception and data collection stages, and for stakeholders to review and comment on the draft report.
- 12. What is the latest possible timing of an evaluation, so that it comes in time to influence decision making?** Preliminary evaluation findings need to be available at key decision-making points.
- 13. Can evaluation recommendations, which build on pre-COVID data collection, be reviewed at reporting stage?** Evaluation recommendations should be reviewed considering the current context to reassess their feasibility and relevance. Potential delays on follow-up actions should also be identified.
- 14. Can validation workshops be conducted remotely?** Recent experience has proven that it is feasible to conduct validation or learning workshops remotely. However, this option should be carefully assessed in light of the specific context of your evaluation as it might present challenges in terms of connectivity, language, and stakeholders' interest and availability. This modality will only allow to have a reduced number of stakeholders. To facilitate discussion, you may consider organizing separate sessions for each of the stakeholder groups.
- 15. Can I recruit national consultants to conduct data collection?** The recruitment of qualified national consultants, including to conduct complementary data collection needs to be carefully assessed to avoid exposing them or others to safety risks based on the do no harm principle, duty of care and ethical considerations. While national evaluators may help in getting local stakeholders to engage with the evaluation process, they would not be in a position to travel within the country and support major quantitative data collection exercises.

⁷ Contact LEGM team within the Legal Office, your Regional Evaluation Officer as well as Julie Thoulouzan and Kathryn Bell-Greco within the Office of Evaluation, and your Regional Procurement Officer and HQ Goods and Service Procurement Service (SCOPG).