Research for change in Colombia and Haiti:

Why we need socio-behavioural evidence for transformative school-based programming

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WFP
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SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Anthrologica

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Executive Summary

In Latin America and the Caribbean, social protection programmes, including school-based programmes, represent a powerful entry point for transformative programming. Across the region, national school feeding programmes reach 85 million people. Formative research has been essential in informing these programmes. Research has provided a strong evidence base to improve the design and roll-out of programmes, making them more relevant and accessible to communities and therefore more effective.

Formative research helps us to better understand the interests, attributes and needs of different population groups and community members. It facilitates two-way communication with communities, enabling a deeper understanding of the context in which a programme will operate and ensuring that communities are engaged from the beginning in the co-design of programme elements. Formative research should be an essential component of programme design and can be conducted rapidly and at low cost.

This paper presents two examples of formative research conducted to inform the design and development of WFP's school-based programmes in **Colombia** and **Haiti**. The Colombia example demonstrates how a school feeding programme can use formative research to look for ways to address additional or emerging issues, such as preventing discrimination. Now, the programme is able not only to promote nutritious meals for children but also to create a safe environment and positively contribute to breaking stereotypes and promoting inclusion at both school and community levels. The Haiti example highlights the importance of identifying social norms and gender-related inequalities prior to the design of a project. For example, learning that girls were served meals after boys at home facilitated the design of appropriate interventions such as the provision of take-home rations.

This paper summarises how evidence was gathered in both Colombia and Haiti, the ways in which evidence was used to inform programming, and how this process has the potential to lead to positive transformation in the longer term.

1. Formative research provides evidence

2. Evidence improves programming

3. Better programming leads to transformative action

1. Formative research provides evidence

Formative research is the process of gathering data and generating evidence to better understand the specific characteristics of a community and its context that are relevant to the programme being designed.

— WFP Colombia conducted formative research to inform its school-based programming, allowing schools to act as a platform for inclusion. The study focused on school feeding, nutrition, discrimination and xenophobia in schools that experienced a range of challenges due to high rates of migration from Venezuela. Through this research, WFP aimed to better understand the needs of children and their communities by using two-way communication to identify barriers and enablers to behavioural change. The research provided an evidence base for the participatory development of a Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) strategy that promoted inclusivity and equality.

— WFP Haiti conducted two formative studies to inform its school-based programming. One focused on gender (2019) and the other on nutrition and hygiene (2019-2021). This research helped identify gender-related behaviours and social norms that resulted in girls and boys being fed differently, thereby increasing inequalities. As a result, WFP aimed to better understand what children, their families and communities think, know and do, to design a people-centred programme with a behavioural change approach.

2. Evidence improves programming

When done well, formative research provides or strengthens an evidence base to inform the design, implementation, adaptation, monitoring and evaluation of a programme. The insights provided by formative research can be used to adjust programmes to make sure they are relevant, responsive and effective. It is crucial that the context and the resulting drivers and barriers to positive action be fully understood so that programming can be tailored to the needs of communities and the intended beneficiaries.

3. Better programming leads to transformative action

School feeding programmes are an example of potentially transformative platforms. They keep children in school and give them the nutrients and energy they need to learn, but they do far more than this. They are a powerful social protection platform to protect school children and their families, enhance local economies, improve the outlook for girls and women, and support peacebuilding and community resilience.

The examples of Colombia and Haiti showcase different approaches to conducting and using formative research and provide key learning for the Latin America and Caribbean region and beyond in terms of harnessing formative research to strengthen programme effectiveness and quality. In both countries, the formative research process shed light on local needs and challenges that go beyond school feeding, such as exclusion, gender inequality and violence. It is clear that the school feeding platform can be a valuable springboard to address other influential issues through transformative programming.

The added value of formative research

◉ Formative research findings can be used to make programmes more relevant to their intended beneficiaries. This makes programmes more effective and sustainable.

◉ Through formative research, barriers and opportunities for programme implementation can be identified.

◉ Through participatory activities, formative research improves engagement and communication with communities and builds community ownership of programmes.

◉ Formative research makes it possible to identify community needs beyond those already being addressed by programming.

◉ Through the research process itself, programmes can become more transparent and accountable.

◉ Formative research can enable programmes to have a wider reach and be more interconnected.

◉ The findings can be used to tailor standard operating procedures to local contexts.

◉ The data can be used to design Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) strategies aimed at transforming behaviours and social norms for positive change.

◉ Findings can be used to develop indicators to measure programme impact and positive social change.

◉ The process and the findings can be used to build and strengthen alliances with current or potential partners and donors, and to improve visibility of the organisation.

◉ Data from formative research can be a catalyst for effective public policy.

To complement this paper, a methods paper and two country fact sheets have been developed. *'Formative research: how do we do it?'* is a summary of key considerations related to commissioning, developing, and using formative research for more effective programmes. It provides step-by-step guidance for the practical application of formative research methodology in the development context. It is based on good practices and draws on specific learning from the formative research conducted by WFP to support transformative school-based programming in Colombia and Haiti. The fact sheets provide a brief overview of the formative research conducted and how the data was used in the two countries.

Contents

Abbreviations

COVID-19   Coronavirus Disease 2019
SBCC   Social and Behaviour Change Communication
UNICEF   United Nations Children's Fund
USAID   United States Agency for International Development
WFP   World Food Programme

An introduction by WFP

Formative research for transformative action

◉ **What is formative research?**

For WFP, formative research is the process of gathering data and generating evidence to better understand the specific context of the areas we work in and the characteristics and particularities of the communities we work with.

◉ **Why do formative research?**

Formative research leads to more relevant and effective programmes. It is an essential component of programme design that can be done rapidly and at low cost. Formative research presents us with evidence for transformative action.

◉ **Here is why formative research is a must:**

> **1** **Formative research provides evidence**