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Synthesis of Evaluations

Evaluation Series on Emergency School Feeding in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Niger and Syria (2015-2019)

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Executive summary

OBJECTIVES, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE SYNTHESIS

This report synthesises findings from the World Food Programme (WFP) Evaluation Series on School Feeding in Emergencies (SF-E) in four countries: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, focus on North Kivu region), Lebanon, Niger (focus on Diffa region) and Syria. It covers SF-E activities implemented from 2015 through 2019. The evaluation series has been commissioned by the WFP School-based Programmes Unit in Rome and has been made possible by a multi-year Canadian contribution to WFP. The same contribution had financed the SF-E activities in the four countries starting in 2017 and was the reason for the including these particular four countries in the evaluation. The findings are meant to strengthen the global evidence base on SF-E and support WFP in complementing its School Feeding Strategy with specific guidance on school feeding in crisis and humanitarian settings.

The synthesis is based on the four country reports of the evaluation series, a review of literature on SF-E, an online survey among WFP Country Offices and Regional Bureaus, and key informant interviews with WFP partner agencies.

CONTEXT

Nearly a quarter of the world's children are estimated to live in conflict- or disaster-affected areas that have experienced protracted crises classified by WFP as level 3 emergencies. This includes the four countries covered by this evaluation series. In 2018, SF-E activities of WFP reached nearly 1 million children in Syria and between 17,000 and 71,000 children in each of the other three countries. The activities sought to address children's nutrition and food security, as well as school enrolment, attendance, and retention, through meals, snacks and Cash-based Transfers (CBTs) while contributing to resilience and development objectives.

KEY FINDINGS

The findings of this report are presented in six Synthesis Questions (SQs).

SQ 1: To what extent has SF-E been appropriate to address the needs of boys, girls and adolescents in the evolving crisis settings and contexts?

SF-E was appropriate for meeting nutritional, food-related and educational, and needs of children in crisis settings. As such, it was directly relevant for SDGs related to food security and education, and indirectly to other goals such as those related to gender. In all four countries, WFP directed SF-E to school children, both boys and girls and their families who needed the support, also including marginalized groups, such as returnees, refugees, and IDPs. However, covering everyone in need of SF-E was generally not possible, due to insecurity or otherwise limited physical access, but also because the SF-E interventions were not large enough to provide food to all schoolchildren in the targeted areas who qualified for support. WFP also faced trade-offs between activities requiring a minimum level of security and the opportunity to address more acute emergency needs in less stable areas.

Implemented primarily as stand-alone, food- and nutrition/driven activities, SF-E was not set up to help take on more complex economic, cultural, psychological, or social barriers to schooling that might affect students from marginalized groups, such as those from refugee, returnee or IDP families or barriers that specific to girls or boys, such as child labour, child marriage, or recruitment into armed groups. Situation analyses and targeting were generally not examining such barriers and could not serve as starting points for program designs.

SQ 2: To what extent has SF-E been coherent with the overall humanitarian response of WFP and other actors?

SF-E has been largely coherent with core humanitarian principles and standards, including those calling for consultations and participation of beneficiaries, local authorities,

and national governments, for the protection of children and for avoiding harmful effects.

Coherence with other humanitarian, development and governmental activities varied among countries. In Syria, good complementarity between SF-E and WaSH and nutrition education at country level had been prepared by the agencies at regional level. In Lebanon, WFP built on the interest of the Government in a national school feeding programme to promote school feeding as a concept and give the Government the opportunity to assume greater ownership of school feeding. In the DRC and Niger, WFP and potential partners did not align their targeting choices and implementation timelines, stated intentions for complementarity in WFP programme documents notwithstanding.

Key global and national humanitarian actors endorsed SF-E as a core component of an integrated, school-based emergency response. Looking for stronger WFP guidance on integrating SF-E into school-based delivery of services, they regretted that WFP only infrequently participated in global and national multi-sectoral needs assessments that informed integrated, school-based response packages.

SQ3: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response supported the education of girls and boys, and has contributed to their food and nutrition security in crises and emergency situations?

SF-E has helped to improve enrolment, attendance, and retention and has increased food security, and dietary diversity, benefitting girls and boys equally. However, monitoring of indirect effects has been insufficient, missing deep analyses of gender, conflict, displacement, and other issues SF-E was sought to address. Where indirect effects could be observed, they were comparatively stronger for children from poorer, more socio-economically vulnerable households, including those from refugee, IDP, and returnee populations. SF-E provided parents with assurance that food and nutrition were regular parts of their children's days.

SQ 4: To what extent has SF-E strengthened the ability of households to cope with crises and (if applicable) helped to bolster local economies and markets?

By transferring resources to households, SF-E can make modest contributions to the capacity of families to cope with income shortfalls. SF-E can help to reduce the incident of child labour, especially when WFP uses cash-based transfer to support students. However, SF-E did not have this effect on child labour in all countries. Evidence on the effect of SF-E on child marriage as an economic coping strategy is mixed. The fact that in three of the four countries, services reached only a small share of eligible schoolchildren limited household- and community-level effects of SF-E and affected its potential to function as a social protection mechanism.

Where WFP purchased commodities and services locally, SF-E also has benefited local communities through economic multiplier effects. However, using home-grown school feeding in DRC also created a trade-off with addressing greater emergency needs in less secure areas.

SQ 5: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response had effects not yet foreseen in WFP's school feeding policy, but that are important in crisis and emergency settings?

SF-E may have resulted in beneficial changes in psycho-social wellbeing, such as heightened self-esteem among students and school communities. However, supporting evidence was mainly anecdotal. Shared meals or snacks were reported to promote feelings of greater equality and a stronger sense of community. Evidence on benefits of SF-E for reducing radicalisation and recruitment of children into armed groups was only indirect and anecdotal. Weak evidence for psycho-social benefits of SF-E, relative to the strong evidence for direct nutritional benefits, is indicative of the fact that SF-E remained an essentially stand-alone, food-based programme. Broader effects would likely have occurred only had SF-E been integrated into broader, comprehensive actions in

partnership with appropriate specialised agencies.

SQ 6: To what extent has school feeding as an emergency response been coupled with creating a sustainable system for school feeding, in line with priorities and capacities of the partner government?

One of WFP's ambitions is to use SF-E as an entry point for the development of sustainable national school feeding programmes that will be integrated with social protection broadly speaking. Where government partners' capacity and interest were sufficiently strong, there was potential for them to consolidate and expand their responsibilities over time and to champion school feeding with other government offices. Where government partners could not assume such roles, WFP had to concentrate on delivering SF-E in the present rather than looking to the future. Obtaining ownership and buy-in for school feeding in hard-hit communities was difficult. Given the difficult fiscal situation in the countries studied, ensuring financial sustainability of SF-E connectedness proved to be a challenge in its own right. Governments consistently signalled that the sums of money required to take over school feeding on a broad scale exceeded what was currently available or what likely would be available in the future.

CONCLUSIONS

C1: SF-E has improved school participation and has provided nutritional and educational benefits to targeted children under crisis and emergency conditions but has produced few observable psycho-social benefits. Benefits to

C3: The insufficiently defined SF-E programme mechanisms (C2) made it more difficult to learn from SF-E activities and to sharpen the SF-E intervention logic over time, also because effective targeting, monitoring and evaluation were difficult without a detailed programme theory.

C4: Unanswered questions on the concrete options for tying SF-E into global and regional, multi-partner humanitarian response packages and programmes reduced the availability of financial resources for integrated SF-E packages at country level and thus made it more difficult to operationally integrate SF-E into multi-partner responses.

C5: Where government partners have the opportunity to actively participate in implementation they can use SF-E to practice and consolidate skills and functions relevant for possible national school feeding programmes. The specific nature and dynamic of SF-E often leaves unaddressed challenges related to capacity building, school feeding advocacy and equitable targeting for developing government-owned school feeding programmes.

C6: Considerable conceptual work remains to be done, and new partnerships formed, to integrate SF-E and school feeding into the broad social protection field, but the prospects are enticing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

R1: Update and sharpen the conceptual and operational framework and guidance for SF-E.

R2: Revise and differentiate the targeting principles and process for SF-E.

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