

Talking Points: Lessons Learned from evaluations on increasing agricultural productivity in Africa (AfDB Evaluation week Panel discussion)

- Intro: WFP's core mandate is to support governments in achieving SDG 2, either through direct humanitarian interventions with distributions or through strengthening local capacities and resources, for example, through the support to smallholder farmers and their associations or the support to communities to build productive assets. WFP works in many different contexts in Africa ranging from conflict and post-conflict settings, such as Northern Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan or South Sudan, to places at risk of climate change, often arid or semi-arid zones in countries like Mali, Niger, Ethiopia or Kenya. In addition, in more stable contexts WFP often provides support through government structures and national programmes.
- WFP has significantly invested in developing its evaluation function, which includes centrally managed evaluations, decentralised evaluations managed by country offices or regional bureaux, and impact evaluations, meeting the growing need for accountability and learning across WFP. Over the last 5 years, WFP has commissioned 16 centralised evaluations, 82 decentralized evaluations, and 18 impact evaluations in Africa alone.
- From this large and diverse body of evidence it is clear that WFP interventions, done right, can have a significant and positive impact on local market actors and incentivize higher agricultural production. I would like to develop this a bit more in three main points:
- First, WFP evaluations have shown that WFP's large-scale food assistance programmes can boost local and regional food production as well as the entire food value chain.
 - At the regional level, a recent evaluation of WFP supply chain outcomes on food systems in East Africa found that the continuous increase in regional and local procurement by WFP to respond to various humanitarian crises in the region, creates a significant demand that allows producers and other market actors to grow in the region.
 - Also, the volumes of commodities shipped by WFP along certain supply routes make it financially justified for WFP to invest in local infrastructure such as roads or bridges, which in turn create positive externalities for local market actors and incentivize local production for trade. An example of such investments are the feeder routes WFP builds in South Sudan to facilitate access to remote towns and communities.
 - At the local level, as shown for example by a recent country strategic plan evaluation in Tanzania, where WFP provides a lifeline for the refugees and other vulnerable people, local procurement is giving the participating farmers an incentive to produce more as there is a predictable purchaser of excess production.
 - As shown by several "local economy-wide impact evaluations (LEWIEs)" such as the one conducted in Rwanda in 2015, the increasing use of cash transfers instead of in-kind food distributions also support local market actors and their suppliers as they are adapting to increasing local demand for agricultural products. Each dollar injected into the local market through a direct cash transfer creates a multiplier effect on the local economy.
- Second, evaluations have also shown evidence that WFP can help develop agricultural markets and boost production through supporting the development of social protection programmes with a local value chain component. The market incentives provided by social protection systems

are usually much more stable and sustainable than those provided by local purchases to respond to emergencies. For example:

- Evaluations in Chad and Kenya showed that home-grown school meals programmes can create a stable local demand for nutritious food items, thereby increasing local production. The injection of cash into the local economy through the schools can thus be considered an important demand-side investment into local production (WFP Kenya study, Chad DE).
 - An evaluation in Ghana provided evidence on how entire value chains can be set up for the local production of specialised nutritious foods, such as corn-soy blend, which is used to prevent and treat malnutrition, with the national malnutrition prevention programme being the main buyer of the products.
 - In Rwanda, an ongoing impact evaluation examines how providing cash-based transfers to women who work outside the home increases their power over household decisions and builds their resilience to shocks and stressors.
- The third point I wanted to highlight is that evaluations have shown that it is often necessary for WFP to provide *direct* support to smallholder agricultural production and value chains, to ensure a reliable supply both in terms of quantity and quality, and to support livelihoods and resilience in a more sustainable manner. In this, WFP has achieved the greatest reach by collaborating with other agencies.
 - For instance, in DRC WFP worked with FAO in a joint resilience programme since 2009, first in Tanganyika and Equateur provinces and later expanding to the Kivus and Ubangi. They supported farmer organizations, combining nutrition-sensitive functional literacy programmes with support to agricultural production. WFP purchases commodities directly from these farmer organizations for its home grown school feeding programme. In parallel, through its food assistance for assets activities, WFP also supported the rehabilitation and construction of agricultural feeder roads, warehouses and market infrastructure employing local labour, addressing immediate food security needs and strengthening local agricultural production and markets. This was a strategic partnership, with a clear division of tasks between FAO and WFP defined at the national level. This partnership was expanded since 2020 to include UNICEF in North and South Kivu.
 - In Uganda, smallholder farmers received training and equipment to reduce post-harvest losses, leading to dramatic decreases in those losses, generating higher incomes and stabilizing incomes across the year, thus incentivizing agricultural production.
 - An evaluation on WFP's contribution to market systems in southern Africa, showed that, when developing food systems, it is important to involve all stakeholders of the value chain (i.e. retailers, traders, aggregation systems, local government, smallholders) at the outset, rather than to focus on supporting a specific group. A successful programme would include interventions both at the supply and the demand side. This also calls for better joint planning and the development of operational partnerships at the outset.
 - Some of our impact evaluations, for instance in Mali, Niger and South Sudan, look at the impact of conditional cash transfers during the lean season on the resilience of farmer households over time. An important dimension of this resilience is to what extent cash transfers help smallholder farmers avoid divesting their productive assets during shocks such as droughts, enabling them to rebound more easily after the shock and maintain their agricultural production potential.

- Question 1: Andrea, you have told us about the different ways WFP interventions can boost agricultural production through food purchases but also through direct efforts to support smallholder agriculture and value chains. What are some of the challenges and lessons highlighted by WFP evaluations?
- Answer:
 - Several evaluations, for example in CAR and South Sudan, have shown that efforts to buy production locally from farmer organizations to stimulate local production are often challenged by the higher cost and lesser quality of local products. These can be due to the limited capacity of farmer organizations and agricultural extension services, limited access to inputs and credit etc. and may require additional support from WFP and its partners in terms of inputs and technical assistance. Because of funding constraints, this additional support cannot always be provided, forcing WFP to reduce local purchases and procure more from traders outside the intervention areas or even at the internal level.
 - Second, WFP often faces challenges with handover of its programmes to local structures, as recent WFP country strategic plan evaluations have highlighted. National structures are expected to assume leadership to sustaining programmes, but they need resources and capacity to do so. Again here it is really important that WFP works in partnership to help strengthen these capacities.
 - And last but not least, many evaluations have emphasized the importance of predictable resources for making lasting change. WFP is primarily a humanitarian organization and receives mostly short-term funding that is often earmarked for food assistance. This makes it difficult for WFP in many countries in crisis to address the root causes of food and nutrition insecurity by providing comprehensive support for a long enough duration to all critical components of agri-food systems.
- Question 2: Andrea, WFP recently developed an impact evaluation strategy. Could you tell us a bit more on how impact evaluations are measuring WFP's impact on agricultural production in Africa?
- Answer:
 - (WFP defines impact evaluations as assessments of the positive and negative, direct or indirect, intended or unintended changes in the lives of affected populations, that can be attributed to a specific programme or a policy through a credible counterfactual. Impacts can be short-term or long-term depending on the outcomes of interest.)
 - For WFP, impact evaluations answer cause and effect questions to understand whether our interventions have a measurable impact on key outcomes, such as food security. Impact evaluations also examine how impact is achieved.
 - Rigorous impact evaluation designs require creating credible counterfactuals, which is an estimate of what would happen if programme participants did not receive the WFP intervention.
 - Based on priority evidence needs, identified together with our programme colleagues, we have established four impact evaluation 'windows' in WFP priority evidence areas : 1) cash-based transfers and gender, 2) climate and resilience, 3) school-based programming, and 4) nutrition.

- The surveys used in impact evaluations under these windows often explicitly look at agricultural production.
- Household questionnaires include a module on farming and livestock, collecting information on the types of crops grown, the quantity of crops harvested, whether the product has been sold, and the revenues earned from this activity.
- These indicators are then used to assess whether WFP interventions are affecting agricultural production and earnings, also taking into consideration the shocks experienced by the household.
- For example, an impact evaluation in Burundi aims to assess the impact of a new decentralised procurement model for school-feeding intervention. Rather than relying on a centralised food procurement system, the new decentralised model is based on direct cash transfers to schools which will then procure food from local cooperatives. The evaluation will aim to assess the impact on local farmers' revenues and production.