

## World Food Programme's Input to HLPF 2022 Reporting on SDG 4 and SDG 5

### (a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs

- **Evaluation of WFP's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic** [\[link\]](#). The evaluation assessed WFP's adaptive capacity in its response to the pandemic. An emphasis was placed on how the response developed rather than a traditional theory-based evaluation. Stakeholder engagement and feedback was central to this approach. The evaluation concluded that despite numerous challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, WFP adapted to meet the needs created by the pandemic and made valued contributions to the global response. Programming continued and support to national social protection systems was expanded to meet new and emerging needs. Technical advice and support were supplied, along with supply chain and logistics support.

- **SDG 4:** At the beginning of 2020, national school feeding programmes delivered school meals to more children than at any time in human history, making school feeding the most extensive social safety net in the world. One in every two schoolchildren, or 388 million children, receive school meals every day in at least 161 countries from all income levels. Between 2013 and 2020, the number of children receiving school meals grew by 9 percent globally and 36 percent in low-income countries. This growth reflects a widespread institutionalization of these programmes as part of government policies for national development: more than 90 percent of the cost of school feeding programmes now comes from domestic funds. Despite these unprecedented gains, the programmes remained least effective where they were needed most: 73 million of the most vulnerable children were still to be reached.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an end to this decade of global growth in school feeding programmes and has sharpened global resolve to restore access to these vital safety nets as a priority. At the height of the crisis in April 2020, 199 countries had closed their schools and 370 million children were suddenly deprived of what for many was their main meal of the day. This loss highlighted the importance of school feeding as a social safety net which protected the well-being of the most vulnerable children and supported their future. The loss also highlighted the need to expand the concept of education to address the health and well-being of children, and to build back equitable, quality school-based health and nutrition services in every school for every schoolchild. More information on the impact of COVID-19 on school meals can be found in the following reports/policy briefs:

- "The impact of COVID-19 on school feeding around the world: A Special Report from the State of School Feeding" [\[link\]](#).
- "School feeding amidst a pandemic: Preparing for the new normal in Asia and the Pacific", conducted by Oxford Policy Management (OPM) and commissioned by the WFP Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau with the support from SBP [\[link\]](#).
- A report in Spanish on School Feeding responses to Covid-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, produced by WFP Panama Regional Bureau with a focus on Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru: "Respuestas de los programas de alimentación escolar al COVID-19 en América Latina y el Caribe" [\[link\]](#)
- **SDG 5:** WFP's Gender Office produced **gender supplementary guidance material** [\[Gender and COVID-19 Guidance Note; Gender, GE4FS and COVID-19\]](#) to support programming to understand and respond to the specific gender issues resulting from the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic.



**(b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “leaving no one behind” against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body**

- WFP’s vision of achieving zero hunger involves ensuring that all people are better able to meet their food and nutrition needs, have better nutrition, health and education outcomes, and improved and sustainable livelihoods.
- With at least two thirds of WFP’s programming occurring in emergency and humanitarian settings, actions to advance gender equality must be grounded in humanitarian principles of the “do no harm” imperative.
- Progress towards meeting essential needs, empowering those left farthest behind and investing in human capital can bolster collective efforts to reduce structural vulnerabilities and enable people to improve their livelihoods, build resilience to shocks and stressors and reduce need.
- School children, and their education, are among the worst and most affected victims of the pandemic in terms of both scale and the very long- term consequences.

**(c) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review**

- **SDG 4:** School based services are cost effective, and can help re-opening schools safely, getting children back to school and putting school systems back on track. Nearly every family in the world, whether they experienced health consequences of COVID or not, was touched by school closure. The most important rebuilding that governments can do to restore normalcy and hope for families, school age children and adolescents is to re-open the schools and rebuild the programmes that support children, like school meals. These integrated, transformational programmes are among the most impactful and efficient interventions to support children, will support pandemic recovery and can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs:
  - These programmes can transform lives and communities and serve as platforms for improving education systems globally. They do more than provide food, particularly when combined with other school-based interventions. School Meals Programmes can support local agriculture and markets while simultaneously improving health, nutrition and education, making communities more resilient.
  - These programmes also promote gender equity, helping to attract and keep girls in school. They can rely on local, family farms and catering companies, often run by women, which can mean more sus-tainable food and agriculture and more local jobs boosting economic growth. Studies show that an average of 1,700 jobs are created for every 100,000 children being fed through school meal programmes.
  - School meals programmes are opportunities to teach children how to eat better while learning about sustainable lifestyles and healthy diets. They can serve as platforms, enabling a more holistic approach to child well-being through the integration of education, health, and social protection.
- **SDG 5:** The independent evaluation of WFP’s Gender Policy 2015-2020 undertaken in 2019-20 confirmed the appropriateness of WFP’s strategic approach. This included the policy’s gender action plan, regional gender strategies, gender results network, gender and age marker, and gender transformation programme. However, the evaluation highlighted that overall progress was challenged by human and financial resource investments that fell short of the commitment to policy implementation. The evaluation recommended that WFP embed gender actions more systematically within country-level policy and programming dialogues, reviews and country strategic plans; identify strategies for mobilizing consistent financial and human resources for gender equality, such as a



cadre of professional gender advisers; and launch a high-level gender equality and women's empowerment steering group to strengthen accountability for policy implementation. Delayed initially by the COVID-19 pandemic, the gender equality and women's empowerment steering group was launched in 2021 to guide and inform revisions of the policy and its future implementation. In 2021, WFP undertook a robust consultation with partners and stakeholders to identify lessons learned from the implementation and evaluation of the WFP gender policy 2015-2020. This led to WFP's comprehensive update resulting in the gender policy 2022 (anticipated approval date March 2022). The updated policy sets out three objectives for addressing the gender inequalities that continue to exacerbate food insecurity and poor nutrition:

1. Achieve equitable access to and control over food security and nutrition;
2. Address the root causes of gender inequalities that affect food security and nutrition
3. Advance the economic empowerment of women and girls in food security and nutrition

The policy updates reflect the maturity of WFP policies and established internal guidance and accountabilities, embrace a renewed focus on innovative international, national and local partnerships, and ensure better integration of gender into programming regardless of the country or context in which WFP works.<sup>1</sup>

#### **(d) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda**

- **SDG 4:** To ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow, learn and thrive, a group of member states joined forces in 2021 to form the global School Meals Coalition and agreed on a set of policy actions [\[link\]](#). The Coalition supports governments and their partners to improve or restore national, sustainable school meal programmes, and strive for every child to have the opportunity to receive a healthy, nutritious meal in school by 2030. The Coalition is a Member State effort, led by Finland and France. WFP hosts the Secretariat of the Coalition and is a proud supporter of these efforts. To date, 61 countries have committed to this effort by signing the [Declaration of Commitment](#). 63 partners have joined the Coalition to support governments in achieving their goals. The main aim of the Coalition is to support governments in championing these goals and objectives at national and subnational levels, with leadership by governments combined with ownership by key stakeholders from all sectors. To this end, governments have already started to take action and are developing national commitments and setting national targets for their school meal programmes. So far, the Coalition has received national commitments by 11 countries: Chile, Dominican Republic, DRC, Finland, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Philippines, Rwanda and USA [\[link\]](#).
- **SDG 5:** WFP supports a people-centered approach that promotes diversity, inclusion and gender equality. Gender analysis will guide the design and implementation of all WFP programmes, including through the use of secondary data and reports prepared by national and international partners on the barriers to advancing gender equality. WFP's updated gender policy 2022 is guided by four interconnected and complementary priorities that provide the foundation for the organization's gender best practices including: enhanced and equitable participation; strengthened leadership and decision-making; enhance protection to ensure safety, dignity and meaningful access; and transformative action on social norms and structural barriers.

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<sup>1</sup> WFP's Gender Policy 2022 is complementary to and in alignment with the following: WFP's protection and accountability policy 2020, the Executive Director's circular on special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the WFP GBV manual, the Executive Director's circular on harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority and discrimination, WFP's people policy 2021, and WFP's Strategic Plan 2022-2025.



## (e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF

### **SDG4:**

- The Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF, especially with its focus on SDGs 4 and 5, should recognize all of the tools and strategies which can improve a child's ability to learn, our education systems more broadly, and in the process, help address gender equality.
- One solution already recognized by more than 60 governments is the transformative potential of school meals programmes to improve education, nutrition and health systems. The Declaration should explicitly recognize the ability of these programmes to serve as cross-sectoral drivers of SDG progress (as indicated under point (c) above) and note the growing research and evidence base that shows direct connections between improved school meals programmes and the potential for better education, nutrition and health outcomes.
- The Declaration should recognize and acknowledge the leadership and commitment of the more than 60 governments (as of March 2022) from every region, working together to share lessons learned and collaborate to drive progress at the national level through the newly established School Meals Coalition.
- This once-in-a-generation crisis in education sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic requires that we leave no stone unturned in our efforts to restore and improve our children's education, especially for girls, who we know are the most likely to be left behind.

### **SDG5:**

- In 2022, WFP will renew its commitment to accelerating progress in gender equality and women's empowerment through adopting and implementing its updated gender policy 2022.
- This renewed commitment places gender analysis, including the need for comprehensive data collection and analysis to inform programme designs, implementation and monitoring, at the centre of our work.
- Further, partnerships are positioned as essential in advancing gender commitments through identifying and engaging with the international, national and local actors, both public and private, who possess comparative advantages that enable them to drive gender results in a specific country or particular context.
- This includes strengthening partnerships with relevant national government partners, gender-mandated feminist and women's civil society organizations that are best positioned as first responders and key development partners in humanitarian settings.
- Progress in food security can only be ensured by addressing the root causes of gender inequalities; this is no SDG 2 – zero hunger, without progress on SDG 5 – gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.