Background and context

During quarter 1 (Q1) of 2020, WFP continued to implement its Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning strategy (MEAL) by conducting process, output and outcome monitoring of crisis response and resilience building assistance activities.

As of March 2020, WFP developed a guidance note on monitoring under COVID-19 environment. To comply with measures put in place by the Government of South Sudan to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19, the Country Office (CO) put in place remote monitoring approaches to conduct process monitoring of food/cash assistance activities. In addition, WFP staff supporting Cooperating Partners (CPs) to implement assistance activities, continue to use observation monitoring methods to ensure people we serve are treated with dignity and respect. Table 1 summarizes monitoring approaches and methodologies adopted in response to COVID-19.

Table 1: COVID-19 monitoring response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of monitoring</th>
<th>Approach and methodology under COVID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Output monitoring</td>
<td>Monthly distribution reports from Cooperating Partners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process monitoring</td>
<td>Remote monitoring by WFP monitors. 20% of sampled activities from monthly distribution plan. Telephone calls to sampled beneficiaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome monitoring</td>
<td>Remote monitoring by WFP monitors. Telephone calls to sampled beneficiaries. Contingent on experience of remote process monitoring.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complaints and Feedback Mechanism</td>
<td>WFP’s toll-free hotline is operated from Juba and Bor Field Office. In addition, WFP has offered to provide human resource support to scale up the national hotline (6666).</td>
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Highlights

- Developed guidelines for monitoring under COVID-19.
- Monitoring coverage for process monitoring increased from 12% in Q1, 2019 to 32% in Q1, 2020.
- First phase of Post Distribution Outcome Monitoring postponed to June 2020, pending lessons learnt from the remote process monitoring.
- New integrated process monitoring and reporting rolled out.

Key performance highlights

A. Output monitoring

Output monitoring of food assistance activities is conducted by CPs supported by WFP’s Planning, Partnership and Reporting (PPR) team and technical units. The CPs collect data and report on output level indicators on a monthly basis through COMET (a web-based planning and reporting platform). MEAL continued to provide surge support to PPR Unit by reviewing monthly reports submitted by CPs.

B. Process monitoring

WFP conducts monthly monitoring of food assistance activities (general food distribution, food for assets, school feeding, support for agricultural market systems, nutritional support among others). Based on the monthly distribution plans, 20% of all final distribution points (FDPs) by each activity, are monitored by WFP CO and Field Office (FO) monitors. In February 2020, MEAL Unit conducted a training on process monitoring for MEAL focal points from all FOs and the CO.

During the first quarter of 2020, 2,024 ICSP locations were monitored representing an increase in monitoring coverage of food assistance activities from 12% to 32% in comparison to the same period in 2019. Improved monitoring coverage is attributed to capacity building training conducted for MEAL focal points based at FOs, timely surge support from the country office, and close follow up on progress of monitoring by FOs.
During Q1 of 2020, WFP South Sudan Country Office rolled out an integrated process monitoring system which entails use of one monitoring tool and reporting dashboard for activity monitoring, distribution, and warehouse monitoring. This integration is aimed at enhancing efficiency in data collection and improving quality of monitoring reports to inform evidence-based decision-making processes.

Planning for implementation of remote monitoring was conducted including developing new monitoring tools, creating a databank of respondents (beneficiaries) and pre-testing data collection tools. Roll-out of remote monitoring will be conducted in April 2020. Experiences and lessons learned from the pilot phase of remote monitoring will inform decisions to scale up remote monitoring activities.

The reported cases of feedback/complaints predominantly related to (i) Requests for information about distribution date, (ii) loss/stolen entitlement cards, and (iii) Delays in distribution (request for distribution to be on-time). The cases are referred to the relevant focal points at the field offices, technical units, and where necessary, to external agencies for resolution.

E. Other assessments and Evaluations

Before the adjustment of monitoring activities in response to COVID-19, WFP had already initiated implementation of planned assessments/evaluations. As at end of Q1, 2020, progress of planned assessments were at various stages of implementation as follows:

- Assessment of the impact of the 2019 floods on assets created under the Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) Assistance: Initially planned to happen in five counties, the assessment was conducted in two counties (Bor and Yida) due to the COVID-19 environment movement restrictions, with 11 beneficiaries interviewed. The findings of the assessment are currently under analysis and report preparation.
Baseline study for Feeder Roads’ Implementation and Maintenance Project: A baseline survey carried out through a contracted international consultant. The results will provide benchmarks for measurement of the Project’s progress and achievements during mid-term [MTR] in 2021 and on completion in 2022. Data analysis and reporting is underway.

During Q1, 2020, progress on other evaluations is summarized below:

- Decentralized Evaluation for FFA: Inception Report finalized, and data collection scheduled for March/April postponed until further notice.
- LEWIE study for FFA: Inception mission conducted by the external consultant. Preparation of Inception Report is underway. Data collection planned for June/July 2020 will be affected by COVID-19.
- Impact evaluation of Joint Resilience Programme implemented in collaboration with UNICEF: Evaluation design at advanced stage but design workshop scheduled for March/April 2020 was cancelled. Data collection scheduled for quarter 3, 2020 will be delayed. Remote data collection options are being considered in the context of COVID-19.

Challenges and potential mitigation measures

The Government of South Sudan has issued guidelines outlining measures to prevent and mitigate the spread and transmission of COVID-19. Some of these measures include maintaining social distancing and restricting movements, among others. These measures have affected the extent to which WFP can monitor food assistance activities. To mitigate the risks associated with food assistance with limited monitoring, MEAL has developed guidelines for use to conduct remote monitoring of food/cash assistance activities.

Lessons learned

Digitization of monitoring processes has contributed to:

- Enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in data collection.
- Improved utilization of monitoring findings to inform decision making.
- Reduced timelines for data analysis and monitoring reporting.
- Improved follow up and resolution of monitoring issues by Field Offices, Technical units and Cooperating Partners.