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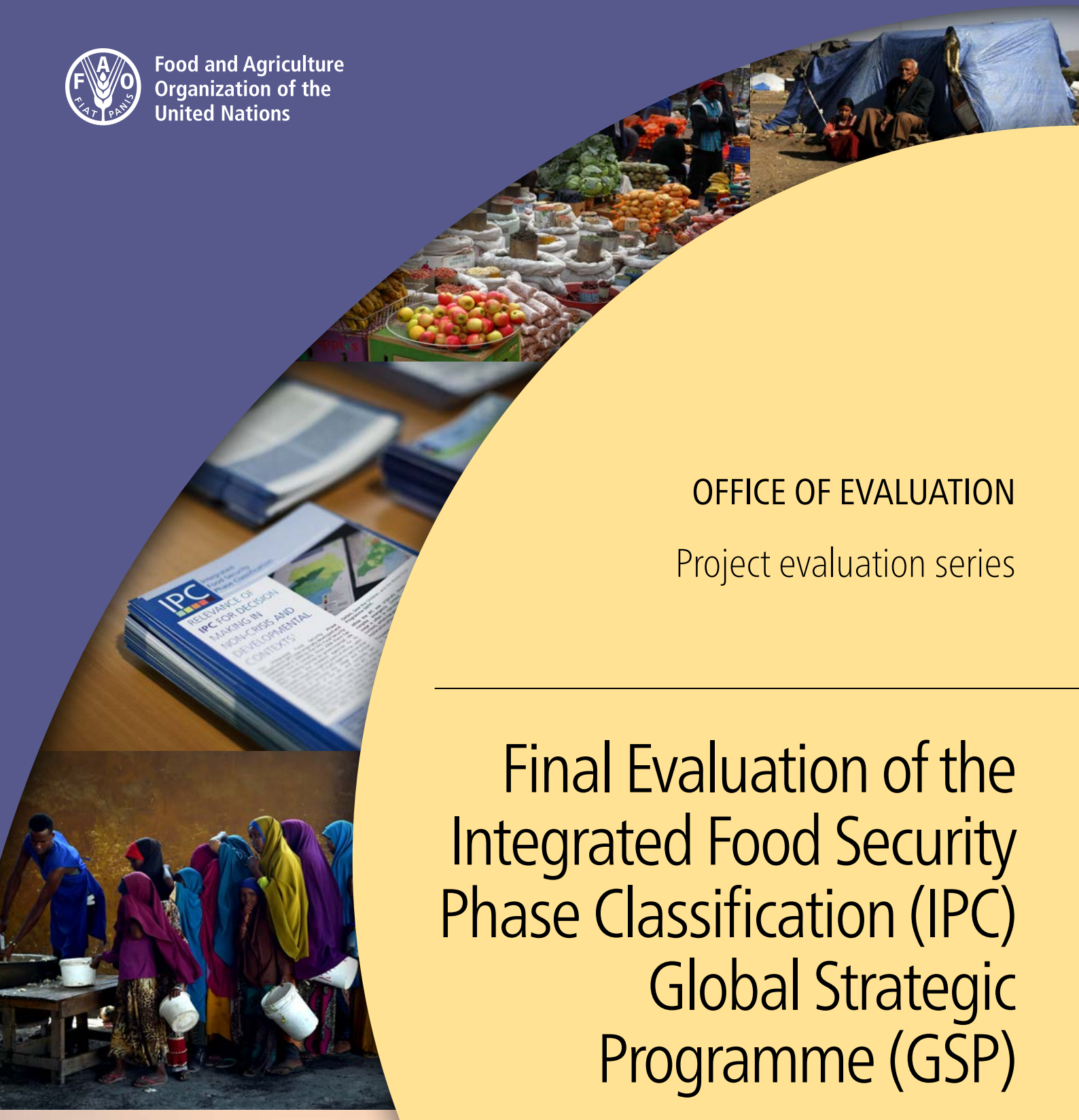

OFFICE OF EVALUATION

Project evaluation series

Final Evaluation of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Global Strategic Programme (GSP)

2014-2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 2019

PROJECT EVALUATION SERIES

Final Evaluation of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Global Strategic Programme (GSP) (2014-2018)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Acronyms and abbreviations

AFI	Acute food insecurity scale
AMN	Acute malnutrition scale
CFI	Chronic food insecurity
CH	Cadre Harmonisé
CILSS	Comité Permanent Inter-Etat de Lutte Contre La Sécheresse dans le Sahel
DFID	UK's Department for International Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GSP	Global Strategic Programme
GSU	Global Support Unit
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
TWG	Technical Working Group
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

1. This is the final evaluation of the first phase of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Global Strategic Programme (GSP), from 2014 to 2018. Focused at a strategic level, the evaluation has a strong learning purpose; it makes recommendations for the next phase of the GSP. It also fulfils an accountability purpose to the GSP's three donor agencies. The overall strategic objective of the GSP is that '*decision makers at the global, regional and country level use the IPC for decision-making and this is providing the evidence and standards for better decisions that improve emergency and development policy and programming*'. This evaluation places use of the IPC centre-stage. The findings are based upon key informant interviews, especially with IPC users at global, regional and country levels; visits to four countries; remote interviews covering a further three countries; an online survey targeting IPC users; and documentation review.

2. The **external environment** in which the GSP was first designed has changed significantly, in terms of food security trends and the institutional context in which they are addressed, for example the increasing humanitarian caseload and the attention now given to the humanitarian-development nexus. The profile and influence of the IPC and Cadre Harmonisé (CH) have increased substantially at global level, and also as a key source of information and analysis in four famine-affected countries in the last couple of years: Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen..

3. **The GSP** has expanded substantially over its first phase, more than doubling its annual budget between 2012 and 2017 and doubling the staff complement in the Global Support Unit (GSU). It has provided direct support to 36 countries applying one, two, or all three IPC scales.

Use of the IPC CFI scale

4. The principal users of the IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) scale are donor agencies at country, regional and global levels. It has become the 'global standard', and donors' main source of information on food security. Those closest to the IPC (e.g. funding it) understand it best and are most aware of both its strengths and weaknesses. Donors with less proximity to IPC processes are less aware of its limitations. It is used principally for decisions about humanitarian funding – globally and within countries, and for targeting, especially for countries experiencing recurrent or protracted crises where the IPC has become well-established, for example in Afghanistan and South Sudan. In countries with less frequency of humanitarian crises, such as Honduras or Pakistan, the AFI is used more as background contextual information unless the analysis shows Phase 3 classification or above.

5. The United Nations uses the AFI results to inform the annual Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) in many countries, for example in calculating the anticipated number in need of humanitarian assistance in the coming year. In countries with recurrent and protracted humanitarian crises it is a

key source of information to the Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) cluster. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP) are major users of the AFI for high-level resources allocation decisions, but are more likely to use their own survey and assessment data for more nuanced programming and targeting decisions. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) use the AFI for high-level planning decisions and for lobbying and fundraising with donors. Although the AFI must usually be endorsed by the respective national government before it is released, government officers are less significant users. The AFI is more likely to inform government decision-making if they have an annual humanitarian response planning system in place.

6. The AFI originated in Africa and is used by more countries in Africa than in other continents. The online survey results showed higher satisfaction levels with the AFI in Sub-Saharan Africa than in Asia and Latin America.

7. The IPC AFI has, de facto, become the mechanism for declaring famine, whether it is threatened, likely, or actually happening in countries implementing the IPC. This is a powerful trigger for a scaled-up response, although it is also evidence of a failure of early action in response to early warning on the part of the international humanitarian aid community and governments.

8. The collective and consensus-based nature of the AFI is regarded by users as its greatest added value. This, combined with the systematic structured IPC analysis process, gives it both authority and credibility. As a global international standard it can be used to make comparisons over space and time. Quality is the main factor affecting use of the AFI, positively when it is seen as reliable, and negatively where there are concerns about the quality of data feeding into the analysis and/or the IPC analysis process. Other factors affecting use include timeliness, in relation to the timing of key decisions, and dependent upon the prompt release of the IPC findings. The more frequently the AFI is carried out, the more likely it is to be used and to meet decision makers' needs, for example in countries with protracted crises where the AFI is carried out more than once a year.

9. Where users do not have adequate knowledge and understanding of the IPC and of associated food security concepts, this hinders their ability to use it in decision-making. Eighty percent of respondents to the online survey 'fully agreed' or 'mostly agreed' that the AFI met their needs. Where it did not, this was due to factors such as inadequate disaggregation in terms of the territorial level of analysis, and users wanting more information on who is in need of assistance (disaggregation by population group), what they need, and the drivers and causes of food insecurity.

10. The acute malnutrition scale (AMN) is used by some agencies at a technical level for programming decisions in-country, and has importantly drawn attention to nutrition issues at the global level. But it was infrequently cited as a source of information for decision-making and is not currently informing policy. It has substantial potential, to complement the AFI and encourage a more holistic analysis of food security, but it is not yet fulfilling that potential.

11. In the next phase the GSU plans to step up its investment in communications and dissemination. To date this has been poorly resourced. Apart from engagement with global initiatives using the IPC, such as the Global Report on Food Crises, the GSP has provided limited support for utilization of the IPC. At country level the evaluation found that technical working group (TWG) members rarely had a strong understanding of, or engagement with decision makers. As the AFI becomes higher profile, GSP partners must adopt a more coherent and unified approach on communications.

12. Views differ amongst GSP stakeholders about whether the IPC should be playing an early warning role or not, although this is clearly stated in Manual V3.0. What is apparent is that the AFI is not currently fulfilling an early warning function well compared with its ability to capture the current status of food insecurity. IPC projections – the main source of early warning – have never been tested retrospectively.

Use of the IPC CFI scale

13. The findings of the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) funded case studies in 2017 and of this evaluation reveal little evidence of use of the chronic food insecurity (CFI) results by decision makers in the countries in which it has been rolled-out. Government officers, UN agencies and NGOs see the CFI's potential in informing national and subnational policies, programming and investment plans, using the collective consensus building approach. But this potential has not yet been realized. Factors negatively affecting its usefulness include: the geographic unit of analysis being too large and therefore insufficient granularity of analysis; limited availability of data and poor quality data; political sensitivity of the results; and the challenge of translating the results into recommendations.

14. While the GSP has supported roll-out of the CFI at country level, this has not been preceded by a sufficiently thorough feasibility study, nor adequate engagement with potential users and decision makers. Much more follow-up support at country level is needed. All of this is beyond the current capacity of the GSU.

Quality

15. The quality of IPC analyses can only be as good as the data on which they are based. The growing influence of the AFI has encouraged investment in data collection in some countries, e.g. South Sudan. Data availability is a constraint particularly in countries experiencing occasional pockets of acute food insecurity. Data gaps that affect the quality of IPC AFI analyses include: data on mortality, nutrition and displacement, as well as data from 'hard to reach' areas.

16. The current trend in data collection is towards large quantitative surveys although there are concerns in some countries about the quality of data they produce. Despite many decision makers' bias towards quantitative data, it is important that the IPC AFI analyses draw on many different sources and types of data to fulfil the IPC's 'value added' of convergence of evidence. Robust and insightful qualitative data have an

important role to play in enriching the analysis, for example for areas hard to access where quantitative surveys are difficult to implement. AFI users are calling for greater transparency over data sources feeding into the IPC analysis and of participants in the analysis workshop.

17. Consensus building is one of the most valued yet challenging dimensions of the IPC analysis. There are concerns in some countries that political compromise affects the results, and that those involved in the analysis process are not sufficiently senior to manage such pressure. The AFI's population estimates for different phases are some of the most influential data informing resource allocation and targeting decisions, and also some of the most questioned data in terms of how they are calculated and their accuracy.

18. The IPC's current role in warning of, and declaring famine brings with it a great deal of responsibility. The GSP's Famine Guidance Note has been under constant review and undergone a number of iterations. The IPC's methods for analysing and declaring famine have come under scrutiny from researchers concerned about its inability to capture magnitude and longevity of severe acute food insecurity.

19. The GSU has adapted its approach to quality assurance in recent years, based on experience, now giving greater emphasis to real-time technical support and less to formal quality reviews (real time or retroactive). It is trying to strike a delicate balance between playing a constructive role of technical support during the analysis process, respecting country-level ownership, and the role of guardian of the IPC as a global standard and thus ensuring, even enforcing quality standards.

Institutionalization

20. Institutionalization of the IPC at country level has been a core aim of the GSP with the objective of embedding IPC processes within government institutions. The inappropriateness of this 'one-size fits all' approach to institutionalization is generally accepted within the GSP, and has become increasingly problematic in countries where government may be party to the conflict that is a major cause of acute food insecurity. But in the absence of a clearly articulated strategy or approach to institutionalization there is a lack of clarity within the GSP about what it means, and pragmatism prevails. Achieving the objective of national governments budgeting and paying for the whole IPC analysis is a long way off. In many countries it would not continue without external donor funding.

21. Progress in institutionalizing the IPC at regional level varies widely between regional authorities. The challenge in some regions is to move beyond time-bound, externally-funded projects that support the IPC, to embedding it within more enduring institutional frameworks, learning from the experience of the CH and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (*Commit permanent inter-État de lutte contre la sécheresse au Sahel,* CILSS) in West Africa.

22. Capacity development by the GSP has been key to institutionalization, and has generated positive feedback from stakeholders at country level. This has been a large part of the GSU's work, but as demand for capacity development grows exponentially, a more sustainable strategy for meeting this demand must be found. The focus for capacity development so far has been technical. This should expand to support IPC users and decision makers to better understand IPC results and how to use them in policymaking as well as programming.

23. The IPC-CH relationship has gradually strengthened over the years. Intrinsically linked to each other, any loss of credibility in one will affect the other. Both face similar challenges in producing quality analyses where there are data quality and availability issues, and in communicating their findings. Closer harmonization and collaboration are essential to the effectiveness of each.

Adaptive capacity

24. The GSP, and GSU in particular, has developed a culture of reflection and learning. It demonstrates high adaptive capacity, for example in the participative process of drafting Manual v3.0. The adaptive capacity amongst technical working groups at country level is more variable. The GSU is now encouraging more lesson-learning exercises at national level, important to foster a reflective and learning culture. Adaptation of the GSP in response to systematic feedback on IPC use by decision makers has been weaker compared with adaptive capacity technically.

Global partnership, governance and management of the GSP

25. There are now 15 partners in the GSP representing different types of organizations including UN agencies, NGOs and regional organizations. While some partner agencies have actively engaged in the GSP and IPC at global, regional and national levels, others have struggled to institutionalize the IPC within their own agencies, particularly the international NGOs, partly due to lack of resources and technical expertise. Yet their full participation in the GSP is important to the legitimacy of the IPC as a global effort, and to ensure the GSP reflects different perspectives.

26. The GSU has maintained its independence at global level, but in some countries the IPC is overly identified with FAO with implications for its perceived neutrality. The GSU has skilfully managed the many and varied demands on it. Nevertheless, it continues to be overstretched, exacerbated by uncertainty about future funding which hinders the GSU's capacity to expand and meet the additional demands and requirements of the GSP as the IPC becomes more influential.

Equity/gender

27. A number of IPC users interviewed for this evaluation raised concerns about the lack of disaggregation in the IPC AFI analysis. The greatest demand is for disaggregation to smaller geographical units, followed by disaggregation by different population groups. Addressing the latter is planned in the next phase of the GSP.

28. **The key message** from this evaluation is that with the greater influence of the IPC AFI comes greater responsibility, and this responsibility lies with the GSP as the guardian and promoter of the AFI. While the GSP can be credited with a number of major achievements in the last phase, it will need to prioritize strategically in the next phase to meet the growing demands of the IPC. Realizing the full potential of the global partnership will be key to achieving this.

Recommendation 1. The proposed strategic direction for the GSP should be adjusted as follows:

i. Giving the ***AFI's early warning role*** greater emphasis, and clarifying what kind of early warning role the AFI can and should play, alongside other systems for early warning.
ii. Pausing roll-out of the CFI while exploring options for how it should be taken forward, and whether and how another organization would be better placed than the GSP to take over development and roll-out.

Recommendation 2. More attention should be paid to monitoring use of the IPC AFI and AMN scales at country, regional and global levels.

Recommendation 3. The GSP should focus on strengthening the quality and transparency of the IPC analysis process for the acute scales, as these are key factors affecting the utility and credibility of the IPC.

29. The evaluation recommends a number of ways of doing this, ranging from data sources to consensus building, with implications for who participates in the IPC analysis process.

Recommendation 4. A research funding facility for the GSP/GSU should be established, to build an evidence base to inform future technical development of the IPC acute scales.

30. Such a facility will enable the GSP to commission independent research studies that deepen analysis and understanding of acute food insecurity, for example to strengthen the IPC in analysis and prediction of famine, and retrospectively to assess the accuracy of its early warning projections.

Recommendation 5. The GSP should develop and clarify its strategy on institutionalization, at country and regional levels.

Recommendation 6. The growing influence, use and exposure of the IPC has implications for GSP global partners.

31. This ranges from greater participation in capacity development at country and regional levels, contributing to the GSP according to their respective comparative advantage, stepping up their engagement beyond the technical domain, and stepping up institutionalization of the IPC within their own agencies.

Recommendation 7. The GSP should continue to develop the IPC for better disaggregation.

32. This includes by gender, displacement, supporting countries to disaggregate the analysis to smaller geographic units, and exploring how the IPC analysis can be adapted for urban contexts.

Recommendation 8. Key issues beyond the scope of this evaluation should be explored in the mid-term review (MTR) for the next phase of the GSP.

33. These include the GSP's approach to quality assurance, and the effectiveness and appropriateness of the GSP's governance arrangements

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