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REPORT OF THE WFP EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS ON THEIR VISIT TO HONDURAS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. The Executive Board team would like to thank the WFP country team, led by Jaime Vallaura, for its highly efficient organization – and then reorganization – of a very interesting visit, as well as for its warm hospitality throughout. We thank Claudia von Roehl, Secretary of the Executive Board, and her colleagues in Rome for their support. The First Lady and the Government of Honduras were gracious and welcoming, as were WFP's partners and beneficiaries.
2. The WFP Guatemala country office team – Willem van Milink-Paz and colleagues – deserve recognition for organizing a series of interesting meetings during our unplanned stop-over. Guatemala is plagued by a significant malnutrition rate: 49 percent of children under 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition. The visit to a factory producing a specially developed nutritious food supplement used in protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO) 10457 as part of the mother-and-child health (MCH) component, as well as the lunch with the leadership of Guatemala's Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition and other government representatives, usefully widened our appreciation of WFP operations and of the challenges facing Central America. The impromptu discussion with the First Lady deepened our understanding of government responses to those challenges.

INTRODUCTION

3. Board representatives from Canada, Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Zambia visited Honduras from 23 to 30 September 2008, accompanied by the Secretary to the Executive Board.
4. The purposes of the visit were to observe activities of Honduras Country Programme (CP) 10538 (2008–2011) and PRRO 10444 (2007–2009); learn about their impacts; and hear from WFP's governmental, United Nations and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners.
5. The team met with the First Lady, the ministers of cooperation, education and health, the Commissioner of the National Contingency Commission, mayors, members of the United Nations country team, donors and private sector contributors to the Honduran School Feeding Programme. President Zelaya had wanted to meet the team but was at the United Nations General Assembly; the Vice-Minister of the Presidency received us on his behalf.
6. The team's field visit took it to Choluteca province, a semi-arid area with a high malnutrition rate. It toured a WFP warehouse, observed school feeding in numerous schools and kindergartens, and saw how food distribution for MCH was integrated into the work of a health centre. It met food-for-work (FFW) beneficiaries and their families at a project implemented by the NGO World Vision, as well as local authorities in communities that had benefited from FFW projects. It heard from NGOs and WFP's other partners in the Choluteca branch of the Food Security and Nutrition Network.

CONTEXT

7. Honduras has yet to recover fully from Hurricane Mitch of 1998. The intervening decade has seen smaller-scale floods, droughts and an earthquake, each of which has displaced populations. A portion of the country suffers a very long dry season.



8. Hurricane Mitch prompted attention to emergency response capability and preparedness as well as natural resource management, and created demand for United Nations assistance with disaster risk reduction/management. The Standing Commission on Contingencies (COPECO) was established and has received capacity-building support from WFP, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other partners.
9. Recently, Honduras has been hit hard by the food and fuel price crisis. The Government is responding with increased investment in agriculture, distribution of basic inputs to poor farmers and attention to the problem of access. It is expanding investment in social safety nets and is examining ways to address the growing problem of urban poverty and hunger. Local production has not yet responded adequately for a variety of reasons, such that Honduras is importing more rice than before. WFP is able to buy all its maize, rice and beans from the domestic market but vegetable oil is no longer available for WFP local purchase as it is being exported; US\$8.8 million worth was purchased locally in 2007, over 70 percent of WFP's total food purchase bill for the country.

| Honduras statistics | |
|--|---|
| Population | 7.5 million, 51% rural, fertility rate 3.5 |
| Human Development Index | 116 th out of 177; 27% illiteracy in rural areas |
| GDP per capita (2007) | US\$1,643 |
| Population living on less than US\$2/day | nearly 60% |
| Chronic malnutrition | 33% of children under 5 |
| HIV prevalence | 1.8% and increasing |

10. Honduras has a highly politicized civil service, resulting in sweeping personnel turnover with each change of power. This creates real problems for development planning, continuity, capacity-building and programme execution.

UNITED NATIONS COORDINATION, HARMONIZATION AND ALIGNMENT

11. WFP was a full partner in development of the 2007–2011 United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). It contributes to coordinated United Nations country team policy advice, joint programming and joint funding submissions. It benefits from common services such as security. WFP is a major partner in the development of a food security and nutrition sectoral group led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).
12. A Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was adopted in 2001, but has been under revision by the current Government for over 18 months. WFP's geographic and sectoral areas of focus correspond with government priorities, but some development cooperation funding is awaiting the new PRSP and related negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). An estimate the team heard was that the Government was foregoing US\$100 million per year in funding by not adopting its new PRSP. It was evident that this important tool for harmonization and alignment was eagerly awaited by the "G16" group of international agencies and leading donor countries. In the interim, the "Education for

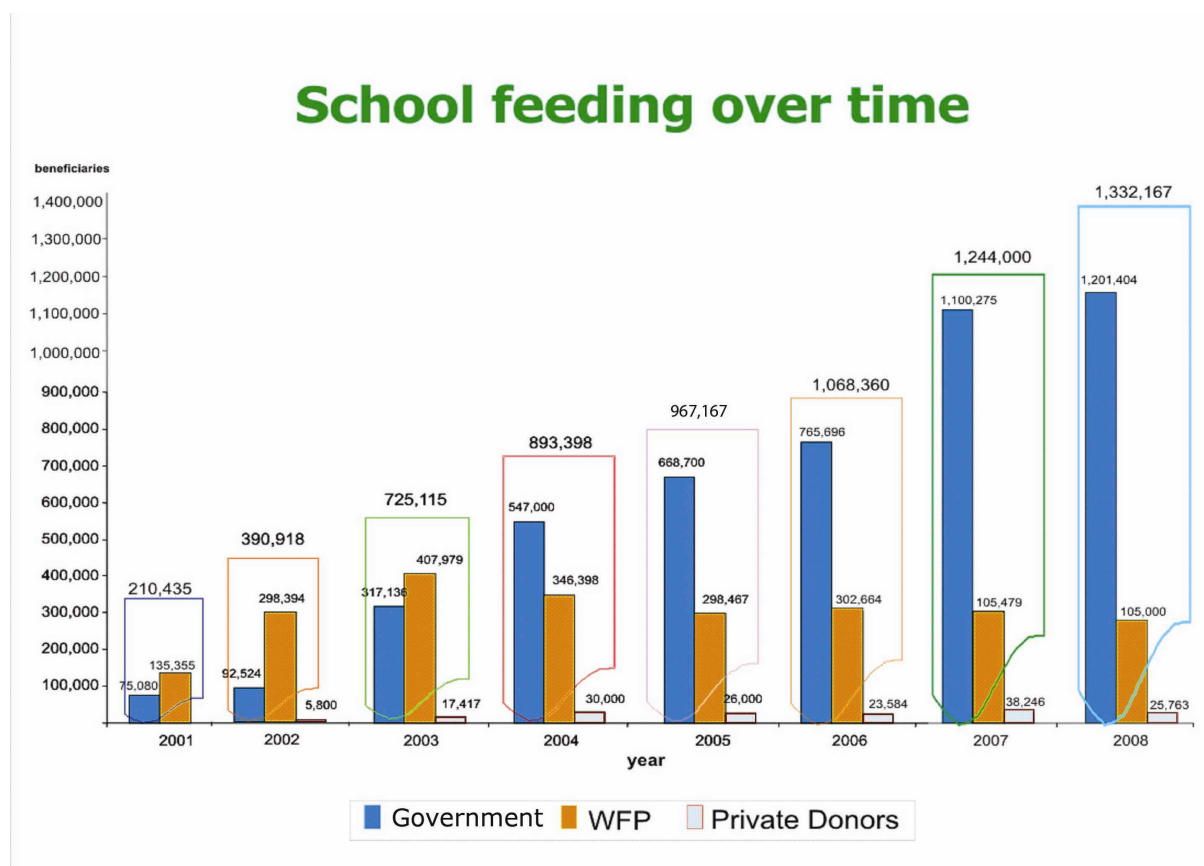


All” basket fund continues to support the Government’s “Healthy Schools” programme, of which school feeding is a flagship component.

WFP’S ACTIVITIES

13. *Emergencies.* COPECO, ministers and all other interlocutors spoke of the close Government–WFP partnership. WFP has helped develop an early warning network in the most vulnerable areas and is contributing to its nation-wide expansion. It is building national capacity in logistics, transport and communications. Its vulnerability analysis feeds directly into national planning. That being said, national capacity remains weak, especially in the areas of disaster risk reduction and management as well as planning for the impacts of climate change. As WFP’s PRRO is only 17 percent funded, the ability to provide support is constrained. The low level of funding also makes it difficult for WFP to respond adequately to small- and medium-sized emergencies, or to maintain adequate stocks to cope with a large emergency.
14. WFP and United Nations consultants helped draft a legal framework on risk management and emergency preparedness, which COPECO and the United Nations country team would like to see adopted soon. This should remain a United Nations advocacy priority, as Honduras cannot afford to let disaster planning fall victim to the political calendar.
15. WFP’s role in leading United Nations clusters on logistics and emergency communications were much appreciated. The team expressed concern to the Resident Coordinator and the United Nations country team regarding the recent assignment of shelter cluster leadership to WFP, following the International Organization for Migration (IOM) departure from Honduras. This additional role was described as “temporary”, although there seems to be no plan in the event the Red Cross does not take over from the IOM. The team explained that the Executive Board had serious reservations about WFP “mandate creep”, and that additional responsibilities that came without funding were particularly onerous for a voluntarily funded programme. The team recommends that the Executive Board discuss with management what can be done to tap UNDP or other sources of funds where cluster duties risk cutting into WFP’s ability to focus on approved and funded roles and priorities.
16. *School Feeding.* This is a national priority, as demonstrated by unanimous parliamentary support for the School Feeding Law of 2006. It enjoys strong public support, fostered in part by a highly successful WFP advocacy programme, and a growing list of private sector contributors. There is evident government ownership at national and local levels. WFP is continuing to develop local capacity for monitoring as the programme expands rapidly.
17. The school feeding programme now covers 16,000 schools, and will soon reach all rural communities. It is also expanding as the number of pre-schools grows, reaching more of the 3–5 years age group. By the end of 2008, 1.3 million children will receive a meal featuring CSB (corn-soya blend, fortified with micronutrients) every school day. Growth in the programme and the numbers of WFP’s national staff is being financed by the Government and private contributions (see figure below), all of which are channelled through a WFP Trust Fund and WFP’s procurement system. There may be no need for further international contributions through WFP to school feeding in Honduras at the conclusion of the current CP in 2011.





18. Government representatives characterized school feeding as a key social safety net reaching the rural poor, rendered all the more important by the food price crisis. The team was told by teachers and parents that school feeding often constituted the only meal of the day and that children were far more alert and active since school feeding had reached their communities. CSB was well accepted, and school feeding had produced measured improvements in enrolment, attendance and retention. The team observed enthusiastic community participation, with parent committees managing the food, performing cooking duties at school level and also supplementing the meal provided. Class sizes were good.
19. The Government spends 30 percent of the national budget on education, and identifies its key challenges as insufficient quality of teaching, insufficient teaching aids and teacher strikes. It wishes to extend free education for the poorest. It sees improved literacy and education as key to developing a better labour force and jobs in Honduras, in place of migration and its attendant social problems.
20. The team observed that most schools it visited were missing elements of the Essential Package, principally proper water and sanitation plus school gardens. Water/sanitation and school/family/community gardens form part of the “Healthy Schools” plan, but more funding is needed. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and FAO were engaged almost exclusively at the level of advocacy and teaching materials in support of these under-resourced elements. WFP was using its FFW where it could to rebuild schools with water and sanitation facilities, or to add them to existing schools, but to do so on a larger scale would apparently involve a revision to the CP. Deworming was covered by the WFP trust fund and was being carried out throughout the country.

21. The team visited a warehouse provided by the Government and managed by WFP, which contained stocks for all WFP programmes, with school feeding representing the greatest volume of stockpiles.
22. *Mother-and-child health (MCH)*. The Government has developed an operational plan on MCH and is preparing to present a strategy to Parliament. WFP has helped to build the Ministry of Health's capacity in the area of nutrition and has contributed to the strategy. The Government aims to include a first funding contribution for MCH in its 2009 budget. It is currently engaged in a rapid expansion of rural health units in the poorest districts. These units provide the platform for WFP's monthly food distribution to mothers in need. We observed the community involved in weighing and measuring the babies and handling the distribution of monthly rations. The health workers advised that MCH encouraged pregnant women and new mothers to come to the centre, where they received check-ups, vaccinations, other basic care and nutritional education. MCH thus helped to maximize the return on Government and international investment in the health sector.
23. WFP currently has limited funds from the PRRO for MCH in recovery areas. MCH is a component of the new CP, but is awaiting contributions. The team encourages Board members to support this critical activity not only as an effective way to address chronic malnutrition and develop human resources, but as a means to encourage the Government's existing inclination to develop MCH into a new social safety net.

There was an acutely malnourished 6-month-old at the health centre the team visited. The doctor counselled the parents to go immediately to the city hospital. The father protested that while medical care at the hospital would be free, getting there and back was not free. The parents would have no means of sustenance during the baby's hospitalization. Furthermore, there were seven other children at home so the mother could not be away for the time required. The couple's previous baby had also died of malnutrition. The centre provides family planning education and free contraception, but many do not avail themselves of it. MCH clearly is not a complete solution, but if started in time will increase survival prospects markedly.

24. The team urged the United Nations country team to step up its advocacy in support of an MCH social safety net and suggested to the country director that WFP give MCH more focus in its public relations, with a view to replicating the success it has had with school feeding.
25. *Food for Work/Training/Assets*. The team met beneficiaries, mayors of beneficiary communities and representatives of World Vision, an implementing partner. It saw a school rebuilt through FFW, but could not visit projects underway as the access road had been washed out by torrential rains. There was clear community engagement and appreciation. CSB was very well accepted in this context as well. The team received requests for FFW projects to rebuild access roads. It did not hear requests for cash instead of food. In a later meeting with the United Nations country team, it was advised that farm-to-market roads featured in the rural development pillar of the UNDAF.
26. Direct beneficiaries were equally balanced by gender.
27. *Cash and vouchers*. The team explored with a number of interlocutors, including government representatives and the head of the main private sector contributor to school feeding (the FICOHSA Foundation), whether there would be a preference for switching any of WFP's programming from food-based to other instruments. These conversations



elicited no interest; rather, many problems were raised. The Government was in the process of setting up a conditional cash transfer system, which may open possibilities in the future. Even with necessary systems in place, however, the problem remained that locally available food did not contain all the necessary micronutrients, so that any move away from CSB risked compromising nutritional objectives. The country office was nonetheless keen to explore the potential for vouchers if this would mean more donor funding. While understanding the country office's requirement for funding, the team questions whether, in the absence of demand, investment in WFP and Honduran capacity-building and system roll-out would represent the best use of WFP resources.

28. *Purchase for Progress (P4P)*. The country office has secured US\$1.5 million from The Howard G. Buffett Foundation for a pilot programme starting in October. If successful, it should lead to a large three-year programme. There is clear enthusiasm for P4P and real potential given the size of WFP's local purchase programme. The Honduras country office was also interested in the Guatemala country office's successful "Vitacereal" project, which forms an integral part of Guatemala's MCH programme. The team shared its view – based on the briefings and factory visit organized by the Guatemala country office – that the "Vitacereal" success could be replicated in Honduras and beyond.
29. The team regretted that there was no opportunity to observe WFP/FAO joint projects and that the FAO Representative was apparently unavailable. The team further regretted that limited time prevented it from observing WFP's HIV and AIDS work, although it heard praise for it from the Government and United Nations agencies.

STAFF ISSUES

30. A marked rise in criminality has negatively affected the security of staff. Two staff members were robbed at gunpoint near the WFP office during our stay. The staff remain very evidently dedicated to WFP's mission and make the best of circumstances, but the deterioration in their personal security is of concern to us all.
31. Staff felt that their work – and that of colleagues elsewhere in the region – was inadequately recognized due to concentration on more recent and bigger crises elsewhere. This perception was exacerbated because the trust fund mechanism meant that the 1.3 million school children were not counted as WFP beneficiaries, nor was the Honduran Government counted as a WFP contributor.

CONCLUSIONS

32. We were favourably impressed with the staff and operations of the WFP team in Honduras and heartened by the evident regard in which WFP is held by everyone we met. While the PRRO may not be the best vehicle for WFP's capacity-building support and policy advice in the emergency and disaster risk reduction fields, given that the needs are enormous and long-term, the work is essential. Members should consider additional contributions while adjusting the financial framework and project categories.
33. We saw a nationally owned and highly successful WFP-run school feeding operation. WFP's share of the overall cost is shrinking rapidly even as coverage expands and local monitoring capacity is built. The Board could usefully discuss how to promote delivery of the full Essential Package where WFP's partners lack capacity or interest.



34. We strongly endorse the move toward developing MCH activities as a social safety net as well as a critical nutritional intervention. This element of the CP deserves to be fully funded and meshed to the extent possible with nascent P4P work, keeping micronutrient needs in mind.
35. The only suggestion received with respect to FFW was for “more”. We were unable to gauge efficacy but did hear clear support for WFP’s work and approach. We would not want to see a rush into cash or vouchers in the absence of demand and solid guarantees that nutritional results could be safeguarded.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) Members should consider contributing to the PRRO so that capacity-building may continue and so that WFP can better respond to the frequent emergencies besetting Honduras.
- ii) The “temporary” assignment of shelter cluster responsibilities to WFP highlights the need for a Board discussion with WFP management as to how to respond when WFP is tasked with cluster duties beyond those approved by the Board.
- iii) The United Nations country team should maintain its advocacy in support of a legal framework covering risk management and emergency preparedness, in support of a national mother-and-child health programme and in favour of civil service reform.
- iv) School feeding is likely to “graduate”, with 100 percent national funding, at the end of the current CP. This success story deserves recognition, along with WFP’s ongoing delivery role and Honduran Government funding. Reporting mechanisms need to be devised that reflect this important work.
- v) The Board and WFP management should discuss how to promote delivery of the full Essential Package where WFP’s partners lack capacity or interest.
- vi) Members should contribute to the MCH component of the CP. The country office should devote more of its advocacy resources to building support for this new social safety net.
- vii) The team encourages the country office to make a priority of P4P, but not of cash and vouchers.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| H.E. Enrique Moret Echeverría | Ambassador, Cuba |
| H.E. Lucy M. Mungoma | Ambassador, Zambia |
| H.E. Javad Shakhs Tavakolian | Ambassador, Islamic Republic of Iran |
| Mr Kent Vachon | Counsellor, Canada |
| Ms Claudia von Roehl | Secretary to the Executive Board |

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

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| COPECO | <i>Comisión Permanente de Contingencias</i> (Standing Commission on Contingencies) |
| CP | country programme |
| CSB | corn-soya blend |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FFW | food for work |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IOM | International Organization for Migration |
| MCH | mother-and-child health |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| P4P | Purchase for Progress |
| PAHO | Pan American Health Organization |
| PRRO | protracted relief and recovery operation |
| PRSP | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper |
| UNDAF | United Nations Development Assistance Framework |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| WHO | World Health Organization |