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SUMMARY REPORT OF THE MID-TERM EVALUATION OF COUNTRY PROGRAMME— MAURITANIA (1998–2002)

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Note to the Executive Board



This document is submitted for consideration to the Executive Board.

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Executive Summary

The objectives of the Country Programme (CP) conform to the Government's policy on fighting poverty. This CP was one of the first to be drawn up in Sahelian Africa. With the exception of aid to vulnerable groups, its activities are extensions of previous development projects. Based on the data available, the geographic targeting is satisfactory.

The CP's implementation has been seriously delayed by the long period needed for negotiations with government counterparts during the drafting of activity summaries and plans of operations. A more thorough preliminary formulation of activities for the next CP should accelerate its implementation. Sufficient human resources are essential, particularly for logistics and monitoring. The Interministerial Country Programme Coordination and Steering Committee is not operational as yet, thus making it more difficult for the CP to achieve coherence and integration of its activities. Cooperation exists between WFP and other partners, but it must be expanded.

Regarding the rural development activities, food aid constitutes an essential catalyst but requires more rigorous programming and new partners. With regard to school canteens, it is recommended that the number of beneficiary children in a given school be progressively increased in order to accommodate all students, and that efforts be made to attain even more selective geographic targeting. The objective of providing assistance to vulnerable groups was to respond to an economic crisis, but it actually responds to an endemic problem.

The CP's activities broadly support the objectives of the Enabling Development policy. In fact, the CP as a whole comprises five activities, all identified as corresponding to that policy. The new CP's activities should include objectives and associated quantifiable indicators as well as the reference data required to measure the CP's impact and its ability to fight the food insecurity of poor households over the medium to long term.

Draft Decision

The Board notes the recommendations contained in this evaluation report (WFP/EB.1/2002/5/1) and notes also the management action taken so far, as indicated in the associated information paper (WFP/EB.1/2002/INF/8). The Board encourages further action on these recommendations, with considerations raised during the discussion taken into account.



SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

1. The principal objective of the evaluation was to determine whether the country programme approach adopted by WFP in 1995 constituted an effective tool for planning and implementing WFP development activities in Mauritania. The evaluation attempted to determine whether the strategy of the programme approach had succeeded in achieving better results than those that could have been obtained by continuing to implement isolated projects in the country.
2. The mission's analysis and recommendations do not constitute a detailed evaluation of the basic activities of the Country Programme but rather are an assessment of the capability of obtaining benefits from the new CP approach and its framework. Nevertheless, given the importance of the new policy regarding the use of WFP food aid for development, the activities have been analysed in regard to the Enabling Development approach, which aims to create favourable conditions, allowing food-insecure households and poor communities to make investments that will provide them with direct long-term benefits.

OUTLINE OF THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME

Rationale for WFP Food Aid

3. A low-income, food-deficit country (LIFDC), Mauritania is one of the least developed countries in the world, with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) estimated at US\$396 in 1998. In 2000 the Human Development Index ranked the country 149th out of the 174 countries reviewed. In the areas of health, education and employment, access to essential services is extremely limited. There has been an overall improvement in certain indicators, however—such as the national percentage of children enrolled in full-time education and the rate of access to health services and drinking water—but these remain well below desirable norms and show marked disparities throughout the country.
4. Mauritania's desert areas cover 75 percent of national territory. Its population, estimated at 2.5 million, is increasing at a rate of 2.9 percent per year, with a large degree of urbanization. Poverty is principally a rural phenomenon, however. At the national level, 41 percent of households are poor and 26 percent live in extreme poverty. Mauritania suffers from a structural food deficit. Its production potential and means of production do not allow it to achieve its goal of food self-sufficiency. Agricultural irrigation is practised only in the country's southern area; elsewhere, rainfed and marshland agriculture continue to provide most of the country's cereal production. Between 1995 and 2000, Mauritania received an annual average of 24,000 tons of cereal food aid, representing 12.1 percent of its average domestic production.

The Country Programme and Its Activities

5. The Mauritania Country Programme was approved by the WFP Executive Board at its October 1997 session. It represents one of the first Country Programmes in Sahelian Africa. The total cost of the CP is US\$22 million for approximately 30,000 tons of food over a period of five years (1998–2002).
6. The objectives of the CP, as presented in the document approved by the Executive Board, are: (i) to improve the living conditions of rural populations by providing better



food security and alleviating the country's vulnerability to climatic vagaries, with greater participation of women in self-development activities, environmental protection and training; (ii) to further the education of children in deprived rural areas by placing particular emphasis on girls' schooling; and (iii) to provide nutritional education to mothers in deprived rural environments and reduce children's malnutrition rates in remote areas.

7. The activities selected for achieving the CP's objectives were grouped around two implementation areas: (i) rural development by means of community works schemes (construction of small dams, dykes, market gardens, etc.), environmental protection and improvement (stabilizing sand dunes, reforestation), and the promotion of women's participation in improving food security, functional literacy and technical training; and (ii) human resource development (school feeding and improving the nutritional condition of vulnerable groups). The CP operates in 8 of the 13 geographic regions of the country chosen on the basis of their poverty index, population density and vulnerability to climatic conditions. The majority of the people in these regions are former cattle breeders who converted to agriculture following the decimation of their livestock during two great droughts in 1969 and 1973.

EVALUATION OF THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME

Orientation

8. The design of the CP was based upon the Government's development policies, in particular the Country Strategy Note (CSN), which adopts an integrated approach by concentrating on the fight against poverty, paying particular attention to the country's agropastoral areas. The CP objectives are in conformity with the government strategy, consisting mainly in: (i) developing human resources, particularly in the education and health sectors; (ii) protecting the environment, with the collaboration of local and regional bodies; and (iii) intensifying farming while curbing rural out-migration. The organization of the current CP activities around the two areas of implementation—rural development and human resources development—appears both relevant and operational; with necessary changes, these two areas should form the basis for the next CP.
9. The design of the Mauritania CP followed the customary preparation of a Country Strategy Outline (CSO), which was submitted to the Executive Board in May 1996, and which recommended that the CP be centred on the poorest rural areas and that it support the Government's efforts to decentralize its development activities. Furthermore, preparations for this CP's implementation benefited from technical support missions carried out with the participation of United Nations specialized agencies: the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNESCO.

Targeting

10. The Country Programme was prepared without the benefit of vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM), which was not being used regularly at the time. Nevertheless, the CP selected initial geographic areas of intervention based on the existing investigation of household living conditions (1988–1990) and on the poverty profile investigation carried out in 1991–1992.
11. The Country Programme activities are targeted to Mauritania's eight southern and southeastern agropastoral areas, which food security analysts consider to be very vulnerable. A reorientation of WFP operations, this targeting—unlike that for previous



projects—takes poverty concentrations into account, deliberately selecting food-insecure and vulnerable regions.

12. According to the data available at the time of the CP's design, the geographic targeting used appears satisfactory. When the next CP is prepared, the activity programming could be improved and the choice of target populations refined by taking into account the results of the VAM analysis under way and data provided by the food security observatory of the Global Information and Early Warning System for Food and Agriculture (GIEWS) and the Famine Early Warning System (FEWS). The selection of beneficiaries within a community according to socio-economic criteria is not easily carried out—particularly with regard to Basic Activity 1—when the activities may benefit the community as a whole.

Recommendation

- ⇒ In order to facilitate the planning, execution and monitoring of operations and avoid fragmented efforts, activities should be programmed in one geographical area before moving on to the next. In order to increase synergy among activities, an integrated approach should be adopted for targeting and for activity planning for the development of rural areas where various CP activities are to be carried out. Furthermore, a specific socio-economic study is recommended to appraise the sustainability and ownership of the assets to be restored or created.

Coherence

13. The WFP presence in Mauritania is a long one (since 1964), and the project approach— at first with regard to education support and since 1971 with regard to rural development— has considerably influenced the present Country Programme structure. With the exception of aid to vulnerable groups (17 percent of the CP's financial resources) the CP's content is in fact a continuation of a multi-purpose rural development project and a school feeding project. The current CP should be perceived as a transitional phase between the project approach and the country programme approach. At the time the CP was formulated, the directives indicating how a CP was to be conceived did not yet exist: i.e. Resources and Long-term Financing policies (1999); the Programme Design Manual (2000); the Disaster Prevention policy (2000).
14. The Interministerial Country Programme Coordination and Steering Committee is not yet operational, and therefore the country office maintains relatively compartmentalized relations with existing partners. This way of functioning reinforces the project approach for CP implementation and makes it difficult to ensure consistency in and integration of the CP's activities.



Recommendation

- ⇒ In preparing and implementing the next Country Programme, an Interministerial Country Programme Coordination and Steering Committee should be formed, under the chairmanship of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Development and with the following principal participants: the country office, the GIEWS food security observatory, the Ministry of Rural Development and the Environment (MRDE), the Secretary of State for Women's Affairs (SSWA), the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (MHSA). The frequency of the committee's meetings should be guided by a pragmatic approach, whose modalities would be determined in the next Country Programme submitted to the Executive Board.

Integration

15. The Country Programme was developed before the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) had begun. It was not until January 2001 that the first CCA draft document was revised and amended by the various United Nations agencies and programmes, and its approval was expected in June 2001. The UNDAF should be developed during the second half of 2001, and approved in 2002. The country office has been participating in a satisfactory manner in this process, and the future CP should profit from the shared vision of the United Nations system for the development of Mauritania. The next programming cycle harmonized for the entire United Nations system should begin in January 2003 and coincide with the expected date for the launching of the next Country Programme.
16. The implementation of the Country Programme illustrates the cooperative efforts of WFP and its development partners, but such efforts should be increased. Examples of limited collaboration can be seen in rural development and vulnerable group projects carried out with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). WFP also collaborates with various United Nations agencies, such as FAO, UNDP, the United Nations Environmental Fund (UNEF) and UNICEF, and with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Bank and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development on a number of joint projects (but the reach of these projects is somewhat limited).

Recommendation

- ⇒ WFP should increase the number of its partners, particularly in the rural development sector. Chosen partners should share a concern for complementarity and mutual support; they should have complementary human and financial resources at their disposal and monitoring-and-evaluation capacity.



17. The country programme approach has had a positive effect on the Government's attitude towards WFP food aid. Aware that the preparatory phase of a CP is unique, with significant resources involved, the Government is getting more seriously involved than it had been during the preparation of individual projects. Governmental counterparts also appear to be more involved and receptive during the implementation phase than in the past. Both the Government and the country office have drawn lessons from the delays experienced in carrying out the present CP, and also with regard to the efforts needed for improving monitoring reports.

Implementation

18. An examination of the CP's implementation reveals that there was a significant delay in starting the activities. The Executive Board approved the CP in October 1997, but the signing of the agreement with the Government did not occur until March 1999. The various plans of operations were not signed until June 1999, and effective implementation did not begin until May 2000. The reasons for this delay cannot be attributed only to negotiating difficulties with governmental counterparts regarding revisions made to the activity summaries and plans of operations. Also at fault was the original design of the CP, which was not sufficiently detailed, and the fact that the definition of the work and respective responsibilities was finalized only after the CP's approval by the Executive Board. Also, the transmission of the documents between the country office, the regional office and Headquarters was slow. Consequently, the low achievement rates recorded to date are more the result of the CP's late implementation than of the limited food aid absorptive capacity of the development activities.

Recommendation

- ⇒ In order to reduce the time lag between approval and implementation of the CP, it is recommended that the work involved in designing future CPs be more thorough. A good technical definition of the proposed activities should be carried out at the time of CP design, so as to facilitate the formulation of future documents (activity summaries, plans of operations, etc.).

19. The CP's logistics activities are carried out through the intermediary of the Food Security Commission (FSC), which provides coordination and which has the necessary storage capacity at its disposal. Governmental technical counterparts (FSC and the directorate for aid to school canteen projects) manage the stock. The audit conducted by the country office in 1998 helped improve food management and introduced the concept of joint management of the CP by WFP and the government counterparts. Thanks to the regional emergency operation (EMOP) SEN 6041.0, the country office now has a logistics officer available (in addition to an assistant) to help implement improved food distribution. The appointment of independent monitors responsible for sending food supplies to beneficiaries within the framework of the emergency operation (which has been extended to all of the development operations) is a notable improvement. However, progress must still be made in the areas of warehouse worker training, the respecting of logistics procedure norms and in-stock management and processing. Retaining the country office logistics section appears to be indispensable for the CP's implementation.



20. In spite of the CP's geographic targeting, the country's extensive size and its limited population density place certain constraints on the monitoring of activities and on food management. WFP programme staff should be maintained at numbers necessary for CP implementation in Mauritania. The staff in the main office in Nouakchott should also be maintained, even if the division between national and international staff could be modified according to the resources available (direct support costs). However, WFP presence in the field is insufficient. Renewing the vacant staff appointments of the two United Nations Volunteers (UNVs), at Kiffa for the eastern part of the country and at Kaedi for the southern part, appears crucial; two other UNVs could be recruited to improve overall monitoring. These four volunteers could be integrated into the local development structures in order to reduce the cost of operating sub-offices in the country.

Recommendation

- ⇒ For the next CP, WFP should have sufficient human resources available to continue to strengthen logistics oversight. United Nations Volunteers should be assigned to the various regions to enhance field monitoring.

Flexibility

21. An examination of the emergency situations that WFP has had to deal with since 1992 demonstrates that these occur regularly each year, either as a result of the presence of refugees or because of recurrent floods or droughts. The current CP does not include resources that could be mobilized quickly in the event of catastrophes, either to mitigate the effects of those catastrophes or for rehabilitation operations. Mauritania has been described as having a "silent emergency", and during the course of the past nine years, WFP has mobilized 46,000 tons of food supplies to meet the country's emergency food needs.

Gender Equality

22. The implementation of the sub-project "Support for Women's Participation" (within Basic Activity 1) faces significant constraints, such as the implementing partner's reduced mobility in the field, which limits that partner's actions to urban and peri-urban areas or to within a 20 km radius of the towns. The sub-project's activities are reserved for cooperatives recognized by the SSWA. This considerably reduces their scope, which is limited to market gardening and handicrafts. Furthermore, the need for training affects the entire destitute population. The experience gained has led officials to consider including a training sub-project in the next CP that would be open to all the beneficiaries of Basic Activity 1 who desired it, and without limiting it to market garden and handicraft activities. Within the context of Basic Activity 1: Rural Development, WFP's Commitments to Women must be viewed in a somewhat qualified fashion. In the Mauritanian context, a simple analysis based only on considerations of gender equality would be restrictive. If needs are to be transformed into significant development actions, taking into account the issues involved, it is more relevant to think in terms of vulnerable communities confronted with the problem of access to vital resources (land and water).



23. WFP's Commitments to Women are more evident within the framework of Basic Activity 2: Human Resources Development. As regards school feeding, young girls receive aid in the same way that boys do. With regard to support to vulnerable groups, women are the principal beneficiaries.

Recommendation

- ⇒ Activities that interest primarily women should focus on technical areas, with partnerships being developed to provide the necessary skills. Functional literacy should be given priority, so that women are enabled to make the most of their knowledge in areas where the possibility of earning substantial income is ensured. This could include tree planting for the production of gum arabic and of wood for heating or building purposes, and the production of animal feed.

EVALUATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF ACTIVITIES TOWARDS COUNTRY PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES

Rural Development

24. Basic Activity 1 supports rural development and food security. To all intents and purposes, the activity is an extension of the preceding multi-purpose project (MAU 2822.0). Each of the three component sub-projects (small-scale works, reforestation and support of women's participation in food security) has its own government implementing agency, namely FSC, the Environment and Rural Development Directorate of MRDE and SSWA. The sub-projects function nearly autonomously, with little interface between the various components. The identification of activities under the new Country Programme was based to a large extent on project activities existing at the time of CP design and did not sufficiently take into account the possible creation of new activities or the adjustment of existing activities in order to create the complementarity and synergy intended under the CP approach. The novelty of the country programme approach for WFP Mauritania and its partners when it was formulated in 1997 helps to explain this compartmentalization to a great degree.

Recommendation

- ⇒ Workshops—in which WFP and its partners participate—should be organized to develop a new definition of activities. The workshops should communicate WFP's new strategic orientation and develop a logical framework that would indicate *inter alia* the modalities to use in selecting partners who possessed a comparative advantage in achieving proposed objectives.

25. WFP's partners, in particular NGOs, believe that food aid is an essential catalyst for mobilizing communities to realize achievements that have high costs in time and labour. Although fundamentally important, food support must be accompanied by appropriate technical supervision and the financial resources necessary for the purchase of non-food items. These complementary inputs must be synchronized, and guarantees must be made that the assets created and the resulting production will directly benefit the vulnerable groups involved. Improvements are needed in certain cases with regard to the quality of



these inputs as well as in developing an understanding of who benefits from production gains and how such gains are used.

Recommendation

- ⇒ Widening the range of partners will call for more rigorous programming. The Regional Development Committee and the FSC programming directorate at Nouakchott will be the main counterparts for harmonizing the various Country Programme interventions. Four-party contracts should be signed with the local community, the regional governor, the implementing partner and WFP with regard to implementation modalities and guarantees on ownership of the assets created.

26. Administrative inflexibility and the absence of necessary inputs have disrupted the start of certain works. For example, staff of the Environment and Rural Development Directorate within MRDE lack mobility to carry out monitoring and coordination. Also, difficulties have been encountered in obtaining minor equipment (wheelbarrows, shovels, plastic bags and plants). These factors considerably limit the leading role that MRDE should be playing in the environmental area and in the protection of production assets such as dykes, dams and wells, and of the plants that can be used for gum arabic, fuelwood and animal fodder.

Recommendation

- ⇒ New partners should be found who are able to contribute to more timely implementation and who possess the resources and capacity required. WFP, under the direction of the Interministerial Country Programme Coordination and Steering Committee and with the approval of the Technical Supervision Ministry, should draw up bilateral agreement protocols with the new partners. This should avoid the lengthy clearance of individual small-scale works, thus adding speed and flexibility to implementation.

27. With regard to monitoring, the WFP country office has organized two workshops to establish monitoring indicators, in collaboration with the government and NGO partners. The use of these indicators is very restricted, limited to the type and number of interventions undertaken and the number of beneficiaries by gender. Certain key terms such as *beneficiaries*, *infrastructure protection* and *family settlement* require additional thought and clarification in order for the data gathered to be useful. In order not to increase the country office's workload, it is suggested that the partners test the indicators chosen and that they review them during the preparatory work sessions for the next Country Programme.

School Canteens

28. Beneficiary schools are situated in the most vulnerable areas of the country. Only the most needy students within a school are allowed access to the canteen. Despite the existence of recognized criteria, the selection of beneficiaries is a delicate exercise, since it is discriminatory and relatively difficult to achieve.



Recommendation

- ⇒ Increase progressively the number of beneficiary students at a given school in order eventually to cover all the students in that school. This will require even more selective targeting of schools in vulnerable areas and of those with a low rate of student attendance.

29. In the opinion of parents, headmasters and teachers, school canteens have a very positive impact on the percentage of children enrolled full time, but no comparative studies exist to support this opinion. The general enrolment rate in Mauritania is quite satisfactory, however, and the new ten-year education plan (2001–2010) is focusing more on children's—both boys' and girls'—longer-term attendance in school. Furthermore, children who drop out of school after their sixth year—particularly girls—are considered to be insufficiently educated. Thus, the new plan envisages the prolongation of basic education.

Recommendation

- ⇒ WFP should aid in this approach within the framework of the new CP without departing from its fundamental objective of assisting only basic education.

30. Parents are badly informed concerning their responsibility in the management of school canteens, but they are generally available when asked to help, and their participation fills an important need in improving canteen menus and the school environment. It has also been noted that in certain areas during the lean season (April–July), a meal taken at a school canteen may constitute a child's only meal of the day.

Recommendation

- ⇒ Rations could be temporarily increased during the lean season, and public awareness, information and training campaigns could be improved.

Vulnerable Groups

31. Aid to vulnerable groups was established following a 1996 nutritional study carried out by UNICEF, which revealed an alarming situation in Mauritania (a chronic malnutrition rate of 44 percent; 23 percent of children with unsatisfactory weight for age), particularly in the rural areas of Aftout. This activity is the only new component in the CP. Its goal is to deal with an economic crisis. It turns out, however, that this is an endemic problem. An MHSA/WFP/UNICEF/NGO protocol has been signed in this regard, but putting it into effect has been difficult.
32. Aid to vulnerable groups is carried out through the intermediary of community food centres (CFCs) and is directed at children from 0 to 5 years, and to expectant and nursing mothers. The activities and projects planned under the Country Programme provide for selective assistance in this area but do not guarantee that that assistance will be continued indefinitely. The length of time needed for the recuperation of undernourished children who have been admitted to the CFC is relatively long (70 days on the average), and the recuperation rate is very low (less than 50 percent).



33. Improvements are possible if meals are nutritionally balanced, if undernourished children are dewormed, if anthropometric equipment is made available and if nutrition assistants are retrained.

Recommendation

- ⇒ Essential medicines and certain micronutrients (iron, vitamin A, etc.) should be made available to the health agent following his/her appointment. In this regard, as UNICEF and WHO are in the process of preparing their new programmes, WFP should be associated with them when formulating the next CP.

APPLICATION OF THE ENABLING DEVELOPMENT POLICY

34. The activities of the Mauritania CP are generally in conformity with the principles indicated in the reference document,¹ which establishes the framework of food aid in development. All five of the CP activities are in line with this policy, including their food-utilization modalities. The essential directives dealing with the geographic targeting of these activities have been respected, while the targeting of beneficiary households should be refined. Working partnerships are now a reality, even if they have to be considerably improved, as indicated earlier.
35. In relation to monitoring the impact of the CP activities on those targeted for WFP assistance, the failure to show results limits the application of the Enabling Development policy. Therefore, key results indicators, particularly with regard to households, must be established in order to facilitate the carrying out of the CP in conformity with the policy.

Recommendation

- ⇒ The activities of the new CP should include indicators for measuring the production of outputs and the achievement of objectives (outcomes). The necessary baseline reference data should be gathered to measure the impact of the CP on the food insecurity of poor households over the medium to long term.

¹ "Enabling Development", WFP/EB.A/99/4-A, Rome, 17–20 May 1999.



ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

CCA	Common Country assessment
CP	Country Programme
CSN	Country Strategy Note
CSO	Country Strategy Outline
EMOP	Emergency operation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FEWS	Famine Early Warning System
FSC	Food Security Commission
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIEWS	Global Information and Early Warning System
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
LIFDC	Low-income, food-deficit country
MHSA	Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
MRDE	Ministry of Rural Development and the Environment
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SSWA	Secretary of State for Women's Affairs
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEF	United Nations Environmental Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNV	United Nations Volunteer
VAM	Vulnerability analysis and mapping
WHO	World Health Organization

