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**Executive Board  
Third Regular Session**

**Rome, 22–26 October 2001**

# **ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

**Agenda item 11**

***For consideration***

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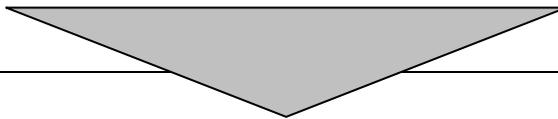
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## **STATUS REPORT ON WFP'S DECENTRALIZATION INITIATIVE**

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# Note to the Executive Board



**This document is submitted for consideration by the Executive Board.**

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the WFP staff focal points indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

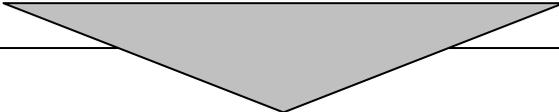
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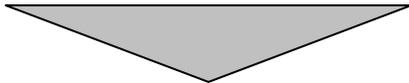
# Executive Summary



The Secretariat presents this report in response to requests by the Executive Board to provide periodic updates on the status of implementation of WFP's decentralization initiative. It follows on from the last two related reports that WFP presented to the Board under Policy Issues, one in January 1999 (WFP/EB.1/99/3-B, "Organizational Change at WFP—a Status Report") and the other in May 1997 (WFP/EB.A/97/5-B, "Reform and Revitalization Measures in the World Food Programme"). These reports all refer to the Organizational Change Initiative launched by the Executive Director in 1996, which coincided with the United Nations Secretary-General's call for a broad United Nations reform process.

This status report lists WFP's main achievements in decentralization since the last update on the subject, presented to the Executive Board in 1999. It describes WFP's efforts at reaching corporate buy-in to the principle of decentralization, as well as some of the opportunities and remaining challenges of decentralization. It concludes with a section on immediate next steps. The report is interspersed with brief analyses of decentralization's main impacts on the way WFP does business. A series of formal evaluations of the components of the organizational change initiative, including the decentralization process itself, is due to take place from 2002.

## Draft Conclusion



The Board took note of the status of implementation of WFP's decentralization initiative, as contained in document WFP/EB.3/2001/11-B.



## ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM 1999 TO 2001

1. Heeding the spirit of the Secretary-General's broad United Nations reform process (launched in 1997), WFP continued to use its development and humanitarian missions to consolidate its transformation into a truly field-based organization close to the people it served.
2. Following are some of the main accomplishments linked to the general theme of decentralization since the last status report on organizational change:
  - a) The Executive Director's objective of placing senior decision-makers as close as possible to the beneficiaries has been met. There were just a handful of senior-level managers in the field when WFP's Organizational Change Initiative was instituted in 1996, whereas today there are 33 D-1- and D-2-level managers in country and regional offices. These managers, together with their country and regional teams, are clearly responsible for the preparation of Country Strategy Outlines, Country Programmes, development projects, protracted relief and recovery operations, emergency operations and special operations, as well as advocacy functions.
  - b) WFP originally created 13 regional cluster offices, which were located in Abidjan, Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Islamabad, Kampala, Lima, Managua, Maputo, Nairobi, New Delhi, Ouagadougou, Pristina and Yaoundé. These regional offices provided much needed technical programme support and managerial guidance to their neighbouring country offices, above all where there were regional and cross-border relief operations.
  - c) WFP established two pilot field-based regional bureaux in 1998: a Middle East/North Africa bureau in Cairo, Egypt, and a Latin America/Caribbean bureau in Managua, Nicaragua. This experience proved very positive and paved the way for relocating the remaining regional bureaux to the field in 2001. Also, by bringing its key decision-makers closer to the poor and hungry people it was mandated to assist, WFP strengthened its position as those people's advocate.
  - d) In late 2000 the Executive Director established the new D-2 post of Deputy Director of Operations. In addition to assisting the Assistant Executive Director (AED) in supervising the expanded network of field-based regional bureaux, the Deputy Director of Operations was assigned as decentralization project manager in December 2000 to play a key role in overseeing the process.
  - e) By September 2001 WFP had completed the decentralization of its Rome-based regional bureaux to the field by outposting both the Africa and Asia bureaux. It established the regional bureaux for West Africa in Dakar, Senegal; Central Africa in Yaoundé, Cameroon; Eastern/Southern Africa in Kampala, Uganda; and Asia in Bangkok, Thailand. The regional bureau for Eastern Europe was restructured and brought to Rome, Italy.
  - f) With the final establishment of the new regional bureaux in the field, this structure was considered streamlined enough, and with a manageable geographic coverage, to allow the closure of 10 of the former 13 regional cluster offices and consolidation of the rest. Only the Islamabad and Maputo regional cluster offices will be maintained for operational and technical support purposes, while the Lima cluster will function as a resource mobilization/advocacy office for Latin America.
  - g) WFP has undertaken the decentralization process within its existing budget approvals. In fact, in the lead-up to the preparation for the 2002-2003 budget, the Executive



Director explicitly instructed that the process be effected with no overall increase in staff numbers.

- h) Further reorganization of the field-based regional bureaux to reflect their increased operational management and country office backstopping roles has meant that the Rome-based Operations Department (OD) can now further reinforce its shift to a more strategic, normative, technical and programme-support role.
- i) The relationships between, as well as the roles and responsibilities of, OD's various Headquarters and field-based offices in the new decentralized environment were formally defined. This included functional statements in key areas of work such as emergency and development programming, finance and administration, logistics and human-resource management.
- j) Delegations of authority to regional directors, regional managers and country directors was further extended in the areas of programme approval, logistics, procurement, finance and resource mobilization. These delegations have also been summarized and documented in a matrix for easy reference by managers and their staff.
- k) There has been considerable progress in decentralizing emergency-preparedness activities, e.g. initiation and management of regional contingency-planning initiatives; establishment of regional contingency-planning workshops, regional reserve facilities, regional emergency rosters, and regionally based situation rooms (SitRooms); and the bringing on board of regional emergency preparedness and response officers.
- l) WFP continued to invest in the development needs of its managers through training of all Rome- and field-based senior and mid-level managers, which included the component of the 360-degree performance-appraisal process. This has helped instil a greater sense of leadership and strategic thinking among WFP's managers.
- m) WFP launched four more comprehensive guidance tools and made them available to all staff on its "WFPgo" intranet site. These are: (i) the Programme Design Manual; (ii) the Non-food Item Procurement Manual; (iii) the Human Resources Manual; and (iv) the Operational Budget Guidance Package. This added to the body of key guidance materials issued to the field in 1997 and 1998, which are: (i) the Transport and Logistics Manual; and (ii) the Country Office Accounting Guide.
- n) In early 2001, after considerable investment of both money and effort in its financial management improvement programme (FMIP), WFP launched its corporate information system—WINGS (WFP Information Network and Global System) in Rome and in the Cairo and Managua regional bureaux. It rolled the system out to its other field-based regional bureaux in September 2001. The far-reaching result has been a significant narrowing of the real-time information gap between Rome and the field.
- o) The introduction of the new WINGS system presented in itself another huge challenge of organizational change, which WFP had to contend with at the same time as it was decentralizing. The Programme has embraced these two simultaneous changes, notwithstanding their daunting magnitude.
- p) Together with its planned interface with WINGS, WFP's Commodity Movement Tracking and Analysis System (COMPAS), set to be installed in some 60 country offices by the end of 2001, promises to be a great commodity pipeline management tool for WFP at the field level.
- q) The Lotus Notes-based System for Programme Approval (SPA) was further streamlined so that it could track approval of all types of operations. In 2001 a



read-only version of the system was made available to all country offices over the intranet. Now field staff involved in programme design and formulation will be able to access the draft and approved project documents of any other country office throughout the world, as well as comments made during the quality-review stage, in order to learn from others' experiences.

- r) With three exceptions (Algeria, Palestinian Territories and Syria), every country office now has access to the Internet, either via WFP's Enhanced Telecommunications Network (ETnet) system or through local service providers. Even the most remote sub-office or isolated vehicle now has access to electronic mail through WFP's pioneering deep-field e-mail system. This has translated into dramatic improvements since 1996 in real-time communications between Headquarters, country offices and liaison offices as well as donors, non-governmental organizations and the media, thus augmenting the efficiency of decision-making in the field. This has also been a catalyst for enhancing the extent to which Rome keeps the field informed on matters related to corporate policy.
- s) WFP has paid careful attention to the observations made by ongoing internal and external oversight services on the issue of decentralization and, where needed, has made improvements to the implementation of the process. Particular focus was in the areas of ongoing monitoring of organizational change and timely issuance of staff directives on the progress of change.

## CORPORATE BUY-IN TO DECENTRALIZATION

### Supporting WFP's Own Staff to Manage Change

3. From the outset it was known that the success of WFP's decentralization would depend to a large extent on the attitude and buy-in of the very people the initiative would affect the most: WFP's own staff. Regular and transparent communication to all staff would be needed, and managers would have to listen to and allay staff concerns. In this respect, the Executive Director issued a number of decentralization updates to all staff, as well as presenting briefings at all staff meetings in Rome from time to time. Decentralization was also the subject of various communiqués and meetings organized by other senior staff in OD.
4. In the first semester of 2001, the Asia and Africa regional bureaux held workshops to flesh out the issues related to implementing their then imminent relocation to the field. This culminated in OD's holding a retreat on decentralization, at which actions for follow-up were agreed on by various divisions in order to ensure a smooth transition.
5. WFP's core training venues, such as management training workshops and Junior Professional Officer (JPO) training workshops, have also included short modules on the issue of decentralization, which allow for opportunities to reflect on how decentralization can affect the ongoing work of WFP staff.
6. Some less formal methods of outreach to staff included using WFP's internal website, which occasionally posted decentralization updates. WFP's internal staff magazine, *Pipeline*, recently also featured articles on coping with change.
7. In fact, the subject of decentralization has by now become so ingrained in WFP's corporate psyche that almost all major WFP meetings or workshops of any kind touch



upon in one way or another the issue of how decentralization will affect the way business will be done in the future.

8. All these efforts to communicate with staff at various levels were aimed at trying to ease the stress that change inevitably brings. In the beginning of the process, many staff went through the natural stages of denial and/or resistance. It may be safe to say now that corporately we are entering the more positive phases of adaptation and commitment, in which we can see the benefits of change.

### Engagement with the Executive Board and Bureau

9. The Executive Director has also pro-actively sought to engage the Executive Board on the issue of decentralization. Apart from the formal status reports on decentralization and organizational change issued for the Board's information in 1997 and 1999 (and now with this report), she has regularly kept the Executive Board Bureau apprised of progress and presented updates on the issue in her introductory statements at recent Board sessions.
10. In the interest of maintaining a continuing dialogue between regional directors and Rome-based representations, the Executive Director made a commitment to the Executive Board in late 2000 for the Secretariat to try to arrange for meetings of respective Board electoral lists whenever a regional director visited Rome.

### Sharing Experiences with Sister United Nations Agencies

11. In implementing its own decentralization process, WFP learned in the beginning from the experiences of sister United Nations agencies such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which had regional offices in the field. It is interesting that WFP's own subsequent experience of further decentralizing its formerly Rome-based regional bureaux to the field is now being closely watched by others.
12. Undisputedly, by embracing its decentralization process, WFP has been very consistent and supportive of the spirit of the Secretary-General's call in 1997 for a broad and far-reaching reform process throughout the United Nations. By completing the decentralization of its regional bureaux to the field, it has consolidated its transformation into a truly field-based organization whose development and humanitarian missions have brought it close to the people it serves.

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## 2001—IMPLEMENTING THE LAST PHASE OF DECENTRALIZATION

### Selection and Setting-up of WFP's Seven New Regional Bureaux

13. The final decision regarding the location of WFP's seven new regional bureaux was made after an exhaustive process, which included consultation among senior staff and review of the experiences of other United Nations agencies, international bodies and missions to potential host countries.
14. The main criteria used to compare the various potential candidate host countries included: (i) staff security; (ii) logistics; (iii) financial aspects; and (iv) living conditions. Staff security aspects included comparing United Nations security ratings and security incident reports. The issue of logistics included international and regional air travel networks, telecommunications infrastructure and regional presence of other United Nations and international bodies, as well as availability of facilities such as conference space and



hotels. Financial concerns refers to the cost of office space (including possibilities of free or partial rental coverage by the host government), cost of international and local staff, banking facilities, audit and inspection track records, taxation regimes and diplomatic privileges. The final category of living conditions looked into issues such as the cost of living, medical facilities, international schooling, spouse employment, housing, availability of consumer items, functionality of utilities, recreation, climate and geography.

15. It was also felt that each regional bureau should cover an average of 12 country offices. This meant that even if a region such as West Africa would have less average volume of resources to oversee compared with another region such as Asia, the complexity of the portfolio would nevertheless balance out, given the relatively high number of least developed countries and development programmes run on scarce resources.
16. After this careful analysis, the Executive Director decided on the location and country coverage of each of the seven regional bureaux (see Annex, “Operations Department Organizational Chart after Full Decentralization—as of September 2001”).
17. The Governments of Cameroon and Senegal committed from the outset to provide rent-free premises for WFP’s regional bureau offices in Yaoundé and Dakar, respectively, and the Governments of Thailand and Uganda provide partial rent for the offices in Bangkok and Kampala. Of course, the Eastern Europe Regional Bureau in Rome reaps the benefits of the Headquarters agreement WFP enjoys with the Government of Italy, which assumes all Headquarters costs. Therefore, it is hoped that all host governments will also be able to provide all the space necessary for regional bureaux as government contributions to the Programme.

### Management of the Decentralization Project

18. As was stated, in December 2000 the Deputy Director of Operations was assigned as the Decentralization Project Manager. Under the guidance of the AED/Director of Operations, his main role was to manage the magnitude of change in implementing “the last phase of decentralization” of the Africa and Asia regional bureaux from Rome to the field. He was assisted by staff in the AED’s office as well as by various consultants hired from time to time to work on specific key issues.
19. Immediately upon his appointment, the Decentralization Project Manager drew up a comprehensive checklist of the elements WFP would need to address in order to make the last phase of decentralization a success. Three main components requiring a particularly concerted focus were identified: (i) formalizing WFP’s relationship with the governments hosting the new regional bureau offices by way of host government agreements; (ii) mastering the wide complexities and implications related to staffing; and (iii) setting up the infrastructure for the new regional bureaux.

### Host Government Agreements

20. In December 2000, the Decentralization Project Manager hired a consultant to draw up a standard pro forma agreement that WFP could negotiate and sign with governments hosting the various regional bureau offices. The process leading up to the final product included reviewing the regional and country agreements of other United Nations agencies as well as liaising with the legal offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other agencies.
21. One major aspect addressed was that of WFP’s dual representational status in the host country. That is, in line with some other United Nations agencies, WFP would request that the host government accredit the Country Director as the WFP representative, as well as



recognizing the Regional Director as the representative of his or her region, thus according to both representatives and their respective staff the usual immunities and privileges.

22. WFP is currently negotiating regional agreements with individual host governments, with the expectation of finalizing them soon. Meanwhile, the host government/WFP relationship is guided by exchanges of letters of intent.

### Resolving Complex Staffing Issues

23. The Decentralization Project Manager hired a consultant to work full time for approximately four months on the complex and delicate human resources issues. The terms of reference included liaising with managers and staff of existing regional offices in the field and Rome (which would be disbanded or phased down), with a view to: (i) listening to their concerns; (ii) communicating the facts to them in a transparent manner; and (iii) facilitating the transition by helping them identify opportunities in the new structure. The consultant also addressed matters such as personnel redeployment, local and national staff separations, pensions, General Service staff mobility and liaison with other United Nations agencies and Staff Associations.
24. One of the major outputs of this effort was the finalization of organigrams for each of the regional bureaux. It was corporately agreed that each regional bureau would have an average of 16 core funded international staff, including a Regional Director and deputy, programme advisers, and support officers specializing in logistics, commodity pipeline management, human resources, finance and administration, procurement, public information and information/communications technology.
25. Inputs were also provided for finalizing WFP's major mid-2001 staff reassignment process, where more than 300 staff were considered for transfer. It is important to note that in the lead-up to the preparation for the 2002–2003 PSA budget, OD respected the Executive Director's explicit instruction to ensure that there would be no overall increase in staff numbers in this final phase of decentralization. A total of 31 International Professional staff posts previously in Rome were relocated to the field as a result of this final phase of decentralization. Most of the General Staff posts were relocated to different Headquarters divisions and liaison offices, while two of them were relocated to the field from the two bureaux in Rome. The liaison offices for all the bureaux are based at Headquarters, Rome. These offices will provide support to the respective regional bureaux and the country offices as required.

### Regional Bureaux' Infrastructure to Be in Place by 1 September Deadline

26. Once the decision of the location of all the regional bureaux was finalized around April 2001, WFP moved rapidly to ensure that the offices would be operational by no later than 1 September 2001, which coincided with WFP's major mid-year staff reassignment cycle. The Eastern Europe Regional Bureau was already active in Rome by 15 July, and the Asia Regional Bureau became operational in Bangkok with a 1 August start-up.
27. The Decentralization Project Manager also oversaw the widely varying office works needed for the different regional bureaux. These ranged from assessing the local market for available premises to refurbishing existing structures to considering major construction investments. Other aspects addressed were connectivity (including access to WFP's corporate information system, WINGS), ETnet, audiovisual conferencing, utilities and services, office equipment and furniture, security upgrades and securing funds for immediate start-up costs ahead of the 2002–2003 PSA budget allotments. In line with her strategic priorities for 2001, the Executive Director approved a budget of about



US\$4 million (from the revised 2000–2001 biennium PSA budget) dedicated to this initiative.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF DECENTRALIZATION

28. The decentralization workshops the Africa and Asia regional bureaux each held earlier in 2001, followed by OD's decentralization retreat, identified the main issues to which WFP would need to pay careful attention as it continued to consolidate its organizational change. These workshops are testimony to the fact that decentralization and change is an ongoing process in a dynamic and fast-moving organization such as WFP.
29. While it was known that decentralization would affect all divisions of WFP, it was also recognized that OD would be the most directly affected. Therefore, in early October 1999, WFP hired a consultant to identify the major impediments to effective implementation of WFP's decentralization, focusing particularly on OD. This was done through a comprehensive gathering of information and analysis of problems regarding decentralization, both at Rome and at selected field offices. In mid-2000, the review culminated in the production of the report "Making Decentralization Work".
30. The report recognized that although great progress had been made in many areas, several of the key changes needed to support a decentralized structure were still unfinished. The main issues identified and discussed in the OD decentralization retreat and the bureaux' decentralization workshops, and mentioned in the report, included the following:
- a) **Real decentralization must be accompanied by more decision-making power and delegation of authority to field-based managers**, particularly at the country-office level. It may be necessary to be watchful of any inadvertent tightening of controls in Rome or in the outposted regional bureaux as a reaction to this process. In response to the need for clearer definition of the OD decision chain—i.e. the various roles and responsibilities of the Regional Directors, regional managers and Country Directors—the Assistant Executive Director issued in October 2000 an Executive Director directive specifically addressing this issue. This directive will be updated and reissued as an Executive Director Directive by the end of 2001 to define the roles, responsibilities and linkages between OD and non-OD divisions.
  - b) **WFP's corporate information systems must be fully implemented, especially regarding their launch to the field.** Since the making of this recommendation, WFP approved the WINGS go-live and roll-out strategy, including an immediate plan to implement the system in all the regional bureaux and soon thereafter in key country offices (those that managed the highest volume of WFP business). There may be scope to review further the delegations of authority and levels of field-based decision-making as the implementation of WINGS is consolidated in the field towards the end of 2001 and well into 2002. For example, WFP is looking into the possibility of increasing the Country Directors' current US\$200,000 limit for local approval of quick-response emergency operations.
  - c) **It is important to identify the normative technical services that need to maintain a corporate profile** and that cannot be decentralized completely (e.g. nutrition and needs assessment) so that WFP does not disperse its normative focuses too widely. For example, the challenge for the Rome-based support divisions, such as Human Resources and Finance, will be to avoid duplicating responsibilities that have moved to the field. In the field of transport and logistics, shipping and air transport



contracting will remain centralized for safety-management and cost reasons, and as both areas deal with a global brokerage market.

- d) **WFP must be vigilant that the decentralization to the field of six regional bureaux will not result in a creep towards the surfacing of six separate, miniature WFPs.** Rather, each regional bureau should work hand in hand toward achieving the goals of one WFP through a standard and consistent approach.
- e) **Clear definition of the linkages, roles and responsibilities of Headquarters and the field in new and high-profile emergencies, particularly at the immediate onset stage,** remains a major challenge for WFP. This will be highlighted as WFP considers emergency activation protocols in a decentralized environment.
- f) **Agreement must be reached on the formal role of the regional bureaux in the context of contingency planning,** vis-à-vis countries within their geographic catchment area, but where WFP does not currently have a presence.
- g) **With the outposting to the field in 2001 of six logistic officers from the Rome-based Transport Division,** the regional bureaux will assume more authority in management of landside transport, storage and handling (LTSH) funds, biannual LTSH reviews and transport contracting.
- h) **There is an urgent need to update, maintain and above all coordinate the linkages between WFP's now numerous existing normative tools and guidelines,** as well as to finalize new guidelines in gap areas such as food needs assessment and contingency planning. At the same time, however, there must be caution against overburdening field-based managers with too much normative guidance.
- i) **A formal, routine management reporting system must be developed and adopted by OD.** OD proposes to address this issue as part of its plan to begin overhauling its operational reporting regime from 2001, and within the overall context of WFP's commitment to results-based management.
- j) **More aggressive efforts are needed to upgrade key field staff skills, particularly in programme design, preparation and formulation.** This need has been partially met through WFP's stepped-up delivery to field-based staff of its training courses in "Enabling Development", "Emergency Response" and "Emergency Needs Assessment".
- k) **More emphasis must be placed on the key role of the regional programme advisers.** It was widely recognized that one of the key functions in the decentralized regional bureaux would be that of the regional programme adviser. Thus, rather than simply being filled by generalists, these posts will, to the extent possible, be filled by officers able to offer real value-added technical and programme support to the country offices in specialized areas such as nutrition, gender, vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM), monitoring and evaluation, school feeding, contingency planning and needs assessment.
- l) **WFP will need to institute a streamlined and simple two-way information exchange system with the field** in order to keep abreast of ongoing and imminent issues and problems that may require Headquarters involvement.
- m) **WFP will need to invest seriously in building the effective corporate memory necessary for an organization that continues to learn.** This is perhaps the aspect that many decentralized organizations have the most problems addressing. Linked to this is the need for an in-depth review of WFP's corporate records-management system, mainly as it relates to a decentralized and remote field structure.



- n) **WFP will have to ensure that the physical separation of its senior managers, dispersed throughout the world, will not result in a total loss of face-to-face contact.** Not all decision-making can be effected through reports, e-mail or even audiovisual conferencing. Regular opportunities must, therefore, be scheduled for face-to-face meetings, workshops and retreats, which will nurture collegiality and team-building.
- o) **WFP's new setup may present fresh opportunities to explore working with donors,** some of whom also have decentralized decision-making structures. There may also be some positive impacts on WFP's relationships with regionally based international organizations, particularly in the area of disaster preparedness. At the same time, WFP must maintain its primary connection to donors and Executive Board members through its Headquarters in Rome.
- p) **The management of change in any dynamic organization such as WFP will never finish.** For example, the locations and country divisions of the regional bureaux may have to change as operational, political and security realities change.
- q) **There is a need to develop project budget and financial-management skills in the field, and to clarify country office budget benchmarks and standards.** It was with this in mind that OD launched in 2001 the first version of its "Operational Guidance Package", which includes guidelines on project budget planning, updated formats and a quick reference index aimed mainly at field staff. This major step forward will provide a firm basis for future work that must continue in this area.

## IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

- 31. **An Executive Director directive will be issued in late 2001** to update the new roles and responsibilities of the regional bureaux, cluster offices, country offices and Rome-based OD divisions, as well as to define the linkages with non-OD divisions.
- 32. **It will then be important to consolidate this new structure well into 2002** and give it a chance to prove itself. Lessons will be drawn from experience, so that the feedback can ensure that the initiative remains on the track to success.
- 33. **The decentralization process must remain within the overall guidance of WFP's broader Organizational Change Initiative,** components of which WFP plans to evaluate from 2002, again drawing up lessons for the future.



**OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATIONAL CHART AFTER FULL DECENTRALIZATION  
—AS OF SEPTEMBER 2001**

