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de Alimentos

**Executive Board
Second Regular Session**

Rome, 24 - 26 March 1997

SUMMARY OF THE WORK OF THE SECOND REGULAR SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD, 1997

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Distribution: GENERAL
WFP/EB.2/97/13
29 May 199722/11/01
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SUMMARY OF THE WORK OF THE MEETING

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POLICY ISSUES

a) WFP support to countries in establishing and managing national food assistance programmes (1997/EB.2/1)

1. The Board endorsed the document presented by the Secretariat (WFP/EB.2/97/3-A). It made the following comments and recommendations.
2. The initiative was appreciated as an appropriate follow-up to both the WFP Mission Statement and the World Food Summit Plan of Action.
3. The Board noted that the advisory role and technical assistance of WFP were particularly important in the context of phasing-out strategies, and in facilitating local purchases and triangular transactions. Interest was also expressed in WFP supporting the identification of appropriate food assistance programmes in the context of potential debt-for-food security swaps.
4. WFP was encouraged to play an active role in facilitating regional exchange and promoting mutual learning from national experiences with food assistance programmes. Country-specific conditions need to be recognized. The newly established Regional Offices will have an important role in supporting the activities proposed in the paper.
5. The proposal for a catalogue of institutions with expertise in food assistance programmes was appreciated. This should be made available both electronically and as a printed document.
6. The Board noted the need for a cautious approach that was demand-driven and within the limits of WFP's financial capacities. The importance of working in partnership with other agencies and building national capacity was emphasized.

b) Report to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on the follow-up to its resolution 1995/56 - Strengthening of the coordination of emergency and humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (1997/EB.2/2)

7. The Board commended the Secretariat for having prepared a very clear and concise document covering the overall progress in follow-up to ECOSOC resolution 1995/56, the process, key issues and recommendations discussed by the Inter-Agency Steering Committee (IASC), and WFP's perspective. In response to the Board's request that the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) share with the relevant United Nations agencies document WFP/EB.3/96/3/Add.1 on WFP and international logistics coordination in humanitarian assistance operations, the Assistant Executive Director informed that the IASC had supported and endorsed the proposed role of WFP as an agency offering significant comparative advantages in providing logistics and transport services for material resources within a system-wide response. At the same time, the IASC recognized the prerogatives of individual agencies to seek the most effective and appropriate arrangements in each particular field situation.
8. The representative of DHA commended the WFP Secretariat for being an active and vocal participant in the IASC process and for having set up an in-house ECOSOC task force which had facilitated the reflection of programme-wide concerns in the IASC's



recommendations to ECOSOC. She also thanked the Board for its interest in the process, manifested by its consideration of this item on three occasions.

9. Regarding the agreements reached within the IASC, she informed the Board that within the United Nations system, there was a need for a more strategic approach to humanitarian response, including a focus on local capacity-building which would contribute to overall peace-building. She also stressed that recommendations aimed at enhancing the United Nations system's capacity were directed not only at the United Nations organizations, but also at Member States, as reflected in the discussions on resource mobilization. Regarding inter-agency coordination mechanisms, DHA emphasized the importance that the comparative advantages of United Nations agencies be recognized and put to efficient use for the benefit of the United Nations system.
10. The Board supported the overall recommendations on coordination, i.e., coordination arrangements based on the Resident Coordinator system, whereby the Resident Coordinator would normally also serve as Humanitarian Coordinator. It also endorsed the recommendations for coordination of assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) whereby DHA would be responsible for inter-agency coordination at the headquarters level and the Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator would be responsible for strategic coordination at the field level. It requested that WFP continue its work within the IASC in clarifying IDP protection and coordination arrangements. Some representatives expressed the view that humanitarian programmes should respect the principles of national sovereignty. It was also noted that Resident Coordinators need not necessarily be recruited from UNDP but could also be appointed from other United Nations agencies/organizations, thus ensuring the appointment of the most qualified candidates available. The role of the IASC and the need to strengthen its decision-making capacity were stressed in this context.
11. As regards the section on resource mobilization, a number of representatives did not endorse the recommendation for a second window under the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) and advised WFP to refrain from pursuing this proposal as they were of the view that it contradicted the concept of the CERF as a revolving fund and considered the Immediate Response Account (IRA) to be adequate as a flexible funding mechanism. The Board endorsed recommendations aimed at strengthening the linkages between relief, rehabilitation and recovery/development, which WFP was mandated to promote. WFP was encouraged to draw and build on national expertise in the context of developing human resource capacity for humanitarian programmes. Similarly, representatives emphasized the need to focus WFP attention on activities aimed at disaster prevention - not just natural disasters, but also those arising from conflict situations, so as to promote a WFP role in peace-building activities. Finally, it was confirmed that WFP's transport and logistics services would be offered on a full-cost recovery basis.

c) Progress report on the Revision of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UNHCR (1997/EB.2/3)

12. The Executive Director introduced the agenda item. She highlighted the importance in formulating and implementing the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) based on joint experiences with refugees worldwide.
13. Recalling the decision of the Board taken at its Third Regular Session in October 1996, to support WFP's continuing efforts to reach agreement with UNHCR on revisions to the MOU, especially with regard to assessment, counting of beneficiaries, monitoring, reporting, and distribution of relief items, the Executive Director noted that the Board had



encouraged WFP to make every effort to present the agreed upon, updated revision at the Board session in March 1997.

14. In response to this request, the Executive Director was pleased to announce that the MOU, which had recently been signed by the executive heads of the two organizations on 17 March 1997, would be effective from 31 March 1997, at which date the previous version signed in January 1994 would expire. In view of the recent signing of the MOU, the document was unfortunately submitted to the Board at a late stage.
15. Important new or revised elements include those addressing concerns related to better assessment of the numbers and needs of beneficiaries, monitoring and reporting, and the role of WFP with regard to the final distribution of food for which it is accountable to donors. Also included in the revised MOU is the need to monitor the food pipeline closely, share timely information and take early joint action as necessary on any potential or actual shortfalls in deliveries. WFP and UNHCR's commitments to women and children are reflected in the revision, notably in the sections on objectives, needs assessment and distribution arrangements.
16. The key to the effectiveness of WFP and UNHCR's joint efforts remains open cooperation and coordination, full and timely information exchange and consultation. This is particularly important at the field level and at a time when both organizations are delegating significant further authority to field managers.
17. An area of concern highlighted by one representative and not fully covered by the MOU, is the problem of environmental degradation.

d) Progress report on WFP's Commitments to Women (1997/EB.2/4)

18. The Board reviewed the progress report on the implementation of WFP's commitment to women (WFP/EB.2/97/3-D), and congratulated the Secretariat on the systematic approach and the efforts made so far in implementing commitments to women. It was noted that the report should have made reference to the Commitments of the World Food Summit Plan of Action.
19. The discussion related to progress made in decision-making and control over food, and the need for qualitative monitoring of such progress; such monitoring should also cover the effects of food-for-work projects on the workload of women. Gender issues should be integrated into all WFP guidelines, and evaluations should devote more attention to gender. Clarifications were provided on the need for measurable success indicators so as to increase WFP's accountability regarding the benefits achieved by women and men. The Secretariat explained that case studies are currently the source of information on achievements, and that the studies reveal considerable variations from country to country. The terms of reference for gender focal points were explained, and data on the current availability of gender expertise at the national, regional and headquarters levels were provided.



GOVERNANCE MATTERS

a) Report of the Open- Ended Working Group on the revision of WFP's General and Financial Regulations (1997/EB.2/5)

20. The Board considered the report of the Open-ended Working Group on the revision of WFP's General and Financial Regulations (WFP/EB.2/97/4), the proposed WFP General Regulations and Rules (WFP/EB.2/97/4/Add.1) and another report of the Working Group containing further recommendations (WFP/EB.2/97/4/Add.2)
21. While taking decisions on various matters referred to it by the Working Group, the Board considered the proposed Article IV.

b) Article IV of the proposed General Regulations

22. In discussing Article IV, some representatives stressed the fact that the presence of WFP headquarters in Rome, Italy, was not being questioned.
23. However, it was acknowledged that the issue of WFP transferring to more appropriate premises, which should have been discussed as a separate agenda item, was not being addressed in a speedy manner. Representatives expressed the need to obtain from the Italian Government up-to-date information on steps taken to provide WFP new headquarters accommodation. The representative of Italy pointed out that the two issues were not related. He reiterated the commitment of high-level Italian authorities to see to it that WFP transfers to suitable premises. He gave a detailed report on this matter. In any case, the Government of Italy, through its Ministry of Finance, would make a firm statement on the financial viability of granting the building under consideration by 30 April 1997 at the latest.
24. The Board took note of the Italian Government's efforts, and encouraged it to continue to take necessary steps to meet its obligations fully within the deadline established by the Board in decision 1996/EB.3/31. The Board stated that it wished to be kept informed on all developments regarding this issue.

EVALUATION REPORTS

a) Thematic evaluation on forestry projects in India - Food aid and tribal people (1997/EB.2/6)

25. The discussion focused on the importance of improving targeting, beneficiary participation, assessment of needs, and monitoring. Agreements on sharing of benefits between the forest peoples and the governments have yet to be reached. The Board urged the Secretariat and the Government of India to make efforts to resolve these issues. The Board also recommended that both the Secretariat and the Government attempt to address the problems of phasing out WFP assistance and finding alternative, non-forest-based employment opportunities for project participants, possibly within an integrated multi-donor-agency approach.



b) Summary evaluation report on ex-post evaluation of the impact and sustainability of selected WFP-assisted projects in China (1997/EB.2/6)

26. While welcoming this evaluation, some representatives acknowledged the problem of distinguishing the project's impact from that of the overall expansion of China's economy. It was suggested that this issue could be addressed by asking beneficiaries to what extent the project had enabled them to participate in the general growth of the country. The Board recommended that due attention be given to the demand of the recent Food Summit that all agricultural production projects should be environmentally sustainable.

c) Thematic evaluation of project Brazil 2732 (Exp.1) - Feeding of pre-school and primary schoolchildren in depressed areas (1997/EB.2/6)

27. The discussion focused on lessons learned, and the importance of designing and implementing sound phase-out plans, which should ideally be part of the original project design. The Board urged the Secretariat to integrate the findings of the evaluation into the ongoing formulation of WFP's strategy on assistance to the educational sector. The Board also stressed the importance of community participation in the management and implementation of such programmes.

d) Summary evaluation report on WFP assisted emergency relief operations in the Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia), including the CLAU operation (1997/EB.2/6)

28. The Board recognized the strategic role that WFP had played in the logistics of the operation, but stressed the fact that WFP should become involved in such activities only in exceptional circumstances. The Secretariat acknowledged that WFP's involvement in logistical exercises would concentrate on food assistance activities. A number of representatives noted that the evaluation was positive, but that in addition to focusing on outputs and operational issues, considerable attention needed to be given to impact and effects.

COUNTRY STRATEGY OUTLINES

a) Country Strategy Outline - Senegal (1997/EB.2/7)

29. Representatives expressed support for the strategy proposed in the CSO for Senegal (WFP/EB.2/97/6/Add.1), and formulated suggestions that should be taken into account when a Country Programme is prepared. It was stressed that the Country Programme should have a manageable size, and give a clear indication of priorities. The monitoring and evaluation system should be reinforced to include baseline data.
30. Concrete measures to increase community participation, especially of women, should be clearly defined. It was recommended that the synergy between WFP assistance and support from United Nations multilateral and bilateral agencies (particularly the World Bank and FAO), be enhanced.



b) Country Strategy Outline - Zambia (1997/EB.2/8)

31. In considering the Zambia CSO (WFP/EB.2/97/6/Add.2), the Board acknowledged the need for increased WFP support to Zambia, but cautioned that the Country Programme should match the level of expected resources. It also emphasized the need for WFP collaboration and coordination with other United Nations agencies.
32. The Board:
- encouraged WFP to pay attention to the collection of baseline data in order to achieve clear and measurable impact;
 - emphasized the need for considering local food habits in the selection of food commodities for local purchase; and
 - encouraged WFP to incorporate community and NGO initiatives into the formulation of programmes to ensure that WFP support promotes sustainable project activities in urban and rural areas.

DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

a) Development project for approval by the Executive Board - China 5717 - Integrated agriculture development in Haidong Prefecture, Qinghai Province (1997/EB.2/9)

33. The project (WFP/EB.2/97/7/Add.2) was well received for its design, comprehensiveness, collaboration with IFAD and strong participation of women. A question was raised concerning beneficiary participation. Notwithstanding the successful implementation of WFP-funded projects in China, and noting China's very positive economic growth, some representatives i) questioned WFP's continued assistance to China; and ii) sought assurances that WFP had adequate resources to undertake this project.
34. In its response, the Secretariat clarified some technical issues, addressed the participation issue through a description of Village Implementation Groups and Village Plans, and assured the Board that, through some de-earmarking and a slightly better resource situation than previously anticipated, it foresaw a more adequate supply of resources as compared to needs after 1997. Nevertheless, the Programme's resource situation would be kept under review.

b) Development project for Executive Board approval - Sudan 531 (Exp.3) - Assistance to primary school students (1997/EB.2/10)

35. Representatives found project Sudan 531 (Exp.3) - "Assistance to primary school students" (WFP/EB.2/97/7/Add.1) to be in line with WFP's mandate. It was considered that the project addressed effectively the problem of gender imbalance in the primary education sector. Given WFP's long-standing assistance to Sudan in the education sector, the Board stressed the utmost importance of taking note of lessons learned from past experience, with a view to promoting sustainability, specifically:
- improving implementation capacity, monitoring and control over the project's activities, and



- ensuring that all necessary inputs from all parties (the Government, local communities and WFP) are in place before actual implementation starts. Such inputs include sanitary facilities and sufficient WFP food resources.

36. In a wider context, the rationale for WFP's development assistance to Sudan was questioned by the representative of Canada, given the conditions prevailing in the country. The representative of Canada would not oppose a consensus approval but requested that no Canadian funds/resources, including the Canadian micronutrient facility, be used for the project. Some concern was also expressed on the phasing-out strategy, as WFP should generally be careful about perpetuating long-standing projects. The Secretariat took note of the written comments offered by a representative, informed the Board on the preparatory measures already undertaken or being put in place, and stressed the humanitarian nature of WFP assistance to Sudan, which is a least developed country.

c) Budget Increase to approved project for Executive Board approval - Ethiopia 4929 - Improving education through school feeding (1997/EB.2/11)

37. The Board expressed its support of the budget increase related to a one-year bridging operation for the Ethiopia school feeding project, with an increased number of beneficiaries, in particular as the country is in a post-war situation and the project targets food-deficit areas. The positive findings of the management review cum-pre-appraisal mission of November 1996 were highlighted. Appreciation was expressed of the improved nutritional value of the ration, as well as of the development of a plan for allocation of resources to benefit girls.

d) Budget increase to approved project for Executive Board approval - Morocco 2288 (Exp.4) - School feeding in rural primary schools - second tranche: enrolment of rural girls (1997/EB.2/12)

38. The fourth expansion of project Morocco 2288 was approved by the CFA at its thirty-fifth Session in May 1993, for an initial duration of two years, at a cost of 20 million dollars, or 50 percent of the proposed total cost (40 million dollars), with the proviso that the remaining balance (20 million dollars) would be contingent upon the Government's elaboration of a phase-out plan.

39. The Government, with WFP assistance, has prepared a sustainable strategy for a phased take-over of the WFP-assisted school canteen programme during a two-year period, inclusive of a concurrent shift, over three years, towards a new take-home ration scheme aimed at increasing girls' enrolment in primary schools in the poorest rural areas (which currently stands at only 26 percent). This scheme is consistent with the Government's poverty alleviation investment programme focused on the 13 poorest provinces in Morocco and assisted by the World Bank, UNICEF, USAID and the European Community.

40. The main points of discussion were the following:

- global resource constraints and prioritization of WFP development assistance;
- Morocco's status as a low-income, food-deficit country (1,040 dollars per capita annual income);
- WFP's policy commitments to women and girls' education (in this case, 83 percent of project costs will directly benefit girls);



- Government’s commitment to girls’ education as a priority in its poverty alleviation programme; and
 - corrective measures carried out by the Government and its commitments to new projects monitoring and accounting systems.
41. With the assurance that Expansion 4 would be the final phase of the project, the proposed budget increase was approved by the Board.

PROTRACTED REFUGEE AND DISPLACED PERSON PROJECTS (PROS) FOR EXECUTIVE BOARD APPROVAL

a) Protracted refugee and displaced person project (PRO) for Executive Board approval - Kenya 4961 (Exp.3) - Food assistance for Somali and Sudanese refugees (1997/EB.2/13)

42. The Executive Board noted the environmental degradation caused by the presence of refugees in Kakuma and Dadaab and urged that consideration be given to protecting the environment through rehabilitation activities using e.g. food-for-work. The possibility of expanding already operational environmental projects supported by other donors would be pursued.
43. Concern was expressed regarding the sale of rations, particularly by the school boys in Kakuma. The Secretariat observed that this problem is related to the irregular provision of non-food items. Attempts are being made by WFP and UNHCR to reduce this phenomenon. WFP was urged to ensure that the number of food rations distributed was consistent with the true number of refugees. WFP will continue efforts with periodic head-counts and ration card revalidation to ensure the veracity of refugee feeding population numbers.

b) Protracted refugee and displaced person project (PRO) for Executive Board approval - Mali Regional 5804 (1997/EB.2/14)

44. The Board approved PRO Mali Regional 5804 - “Food assistance for Malian refugees and internally displaced persons (WFP/EB.2/97/8/Add.3).” Representatives expressed satisfaction with the following features: the regional approach; the participation of beneficiaries in the identification and preparation of food-for-work activities; the relief-to-development continuum inherent in the project; the emphasis on gender issues; the inclusion of environmental protection activities; and the fact that the assistance to refugees in the asylum countries would cease at the end of 1997.
45. Considering the complex nature of the collaboration between WFP and the many implementing partners, the Board stressed the need for an efficient coordination mechanism. The importance of targeting the most food-insecure and the need to avoid any negative effect on self-help activities were also emphasized.



c) Protracted refugee and displaced person project (PRO) for Executive Board approval - Sierra Leone 5802 - Targeted food assistance and support to resettlement of internally displaced persons in Sierra Leone and of returning Sierra Leonean refugees (1997/EB.2/15)

46. The Board commended the contribution of PRO Sierra Leone 5802 - “Targeted food assistance and support to resettlement of internally displaced persons in Sierra Leone and of returning Sierra Leonean refugees (WFP/EB.2/97/8/Add.2)” to the peace process in Sierra Leone. In response to a query on the rationale for enhancing storage and logistics capacity and the related costs, the Secretariat explained that the increased logistics requirements were due to the extension of the delivery network across the country. Regarding the sustainability of the school feeding programme, it was clarified that WFP’s objective was to reopen the destroyed school system, and encourage enrolment and attendance in rural areas.
47. Questions were asked regarding carry-over stocks from 1996 and the composition of the food basket. The Secretariat indicated that there were no carry-over stocks, as this PRO had to replace commodities borrowed from the Liberia PRO. It also pointed out that bulgur wheat was introduced in the food basket in view of its suitability and acceptability and the insufficient availability of rice.
48. Other enquiries were on coordination with NGOs. The Secretariat clarified that all WFP-supported activities are implemented by NGOs. It was also suggested that Sierra Leone did not suffer from a structural food deficit and that the project’s duration might be reduced. In response to this comment, the Secretariat indicated that the food situation had deteriorated since the early eighties as only 30 percent of existing consumption needs is covered by local production.

d) Progress report on approved project - Nepal 5324 (Exp.1) - Food assistance to Bhutanese refugees in Nepal (1997/EB.2/16)

49. The Board appreciated the food management aspect of the project and the refugees’ involvement in the distribution of rations. It also took note of some of the more problematic issues, including the status of bilateral talks between the Governments of Nepal and Bhutan; registration of refugees living in the camps; the food basket and ration; food exchange practices; health and nutritional status of the refugees as compared to that of the people in surrounding areas; and the level of women’s participation in food management. The Secretariat informed the Board of a forthcoming joint WFP/UNHCR comprehensive assessment mission, to take place in April/May 1997. The mission will address these issues; its findings will be described and analysed in the summary report of project No. 5324 (Exp.2), to be presented to the Board at its Third Regular Session of 1997.

