

OMJ Regional Director's presentation at the WFP Executive Board 9 - 13 November 2009

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The enormous challenge of providing life-saving humanitarian assistance to an increasing case load of hungry people continues to define WFP's operations in eastern, central and southern Africa. The protracted crisis in the Horn of Africa, precarious food security conditions in eastern DRC and Zimbabwe and the looming threat of El Niño on livelihoods in eastern and southern Africa connive to increase the need for humanitarian assistance in the region.

2009 has been another difficult year for the Horn of Africa, where the food, nutrition and livelihood situation are rapidly deteriorating due to yet another round of weather related shocks. Global recession, higher food, fuel and input prices, export restrictions, reduced informal trade, livestock diseases, conflict are conspiring with successive years of weather related shocks to increase hunger, malnutrition and overall vulnerability of the population. Total WFP beneficiaries have increased 14 percent since January 2009, from 17.6 million to over 20 million. WFP is leveraging partnership in order to increase programme reach and to maximise synergy between the social safety net programmes involving food and cash transfers with other forms of non-food assistance.

In view of the dire situation in the Horn of Africa, OMJ held a second HoA consultation in Nairobi last September involving donors and IGAD in order to assess, forecast and agree on an action plan on the growing humanitarian needs. Participants endorsed WFP's analysis of the situation and appreciated sharing of information. The same information was shared with you at an Informal session of 8 October. As pointed out in that presentation, the crises is deepening and food requirements are just one of the many needs of the vulnerable population of HoA. We received positive feedback from you and we hope that this would translate into the resources needed to do our work as continues to be the case.

Mr President, in the last meeting of the Board, some Board members requested the Secretariat to improve the reporting system of WFP operations in Ethiopia. I wish to inform you that a joint government and WFP efforts to improve reporting on food distributions have begun in earnest. In June 2009 a joint government of Ethiopia, WFP and donor mission traveled to the main regions in Ethiopia that benefit from food assistance. The mission confirmed that food delivery and distribution information exist at district level. However, the flow of information to the region and federal levels was identified as a major weakness.

The mission further recommended that the business processes of the Department of Food Security needed a review and a new system had to be developed. Capacity building and training in reporting were also suggested.

subsequently, an action plan was developed with three components: 1) verify delivery and distribution data going back to 2007 for both relief and productive safety net programmes. The target date for completion is December 2009. 2) Design and develop a tracking and reporting system for the government and pilot ways to collect and immediately transmit distribution and monitoring data from remote areas. 3) Improve food commodity management practices and the logistics system, including training in food commodity management. In addition to these, WFP is also supporting a multi-stakeholder review of relief targeting practices and a revision of the targeting guidelines. This plan was shared with donors in Addis and it received their endorsement.

We expect that a new and improved system to report on food distributions in Ethiopia will be in place by the March/April 2010.

Eastern DRC is the epicentre of WFP's work in Democratic Republic of Congo the political and security situation remains unstable. More than 2 million people are still displaced and 3.4 million returnees require humanitarian assistance. WFP is currently assisting 1.5 million of the most vulnerable. It is worth noting this assistance is being provided in partnership with other UN agencies and NGOs.

In Zimbabwe, food availability has improved as a result of good harvests of the last crop season and very importantly, fiscal and grain market liberalisation policies of the government. However, the country still faces a substantial national cereal deficit and access to food is a serious concern in the rural areas where cash is in short supply. It is estimated that 2.8 million people will require food assistance in Zimbabwe during the 2009/2010 marketing year. WFP is facing serious resource shortfalls and has had to reduce rations to the safety net programmes. WFP is working very closely with FAO to stimulate small holder crop production in Zimbabwe where FAO is providing seeds and fertilisers to targeted farmers whilst WFP is providing the associated logistics and seed protection rations.

It is estimated that there are about 11 million people living with HIV and AIDS in the region, This group is particularly vulnerable as it is estimated that the global recession is already negatively impacting 70 percent of people on ARV treatment in Africa. Eastern and Southern Africa account for approximately 55% of all People Living with HIV/AIDS and 60% of new infections and AIDS deaths globally.

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Last month we held the annual regional OMJ Country Directors' meeting in Johannesburg. The meeting agreed that the thrust of our responses to food crises and food insecurity should be characterized by the application of new tools, such as cash and voucher programmes, innovative procurement modalities, social protection programmes with particular attention to school meals and nutrition, HIV/AIDS weather related shocks and integrated programming. We reviewed progress in operationalising the new tools. We took stock of lessons learned and

looked at best practices. I am pleased to report to you that Country Offices are making good headway in incorporating the expanded toolbox into their programmes.

The introduction of cash and voucher based activities stimulates and supports local market structures while addressing food insecurity. To date, cash and voucher programmes are implemented or being planned in eleven countries in the OMJ region. These programmes have shown to provide considerable potential to provide safety nets in response to high food prices and economic recession.

The Purchase for Progress initiative is at the centre of our efforts to support smallholder agriculture. WFP is piloting innovative procurement modalities which include pro-smallholder competitive tendering, purchasing directly from farmers' organizations, forward contracting and developing pro-smallholder processing options. Innovations also include WFP's participation in commodity exchanges in Zambia and promoting the use of warehouse receipts systems by farmers' organizations and traders in Uganda and Tanzania.

Since the official launch of P4P back in September 2008, more than 13,000mt of food have been contracted under P4P modalities in OMJ pilot countries. WFP is using P4P as a lever to enhance partnerships with FAO and IFAD. In Mozambique, FAO is providing technical assistance in post-harvest prevention activities of cowpea production, IFAD provides credit and WFP takes care of market development.

We continue to maximize opportunities for local and regional procurement of food. Local and regional purchases provide an important economic boost to countries in the region, save costs and minimize lead times. In 2008, WFP purchased 580,000 mt of food in the region with a total value of almost US\$200 million, and between January and September 2009, about 400,000mt were purchased from the region at a total value of US\$141 million.

The effect of weather related shocks on already precarious livelihoods is a major concern for governments in the OMJ region. WFP is supporting communities in their efforts to build resilience against adverse effects of extreme weather through productive and social safety net programmes such as water harvesting and storage, irrigation and drainage, reforestation terracing, school meals and nutrition activities. In the last three years, WFP has invested in the region over 331 million USD targeted food for work/asset programmes to help strengthen households and community adaptation to extreme weather.

Targeted food for asset programmes that help protect communities against shocks are currently being applied in 11 countries in the region. By 2011, more than 1.7 million Ethiopians will have benefited from WFP's MERET programme. In Rwanda, WFP, in collaboration with the government and other partners has terraced thousands of hectares of farm land and constructed erosion control structures and watersheds. This has increased the resilience of beneficiary communities to extreme weather and other shocks.

Throughout the region, both chronic and acute malnutrition rates in children under five are among the highest in the world. If this situation remains unchecked, MDG targets set by countries in the region will not be attained. Thus the need for concerted action is felt with urgency. WFP is strengthening its partnerships in the region with key UN partners in the nutrition arena such as UNICEF, WHO, FAO and UNHCR, as well as regional Government institutions such as the African Union, NEPAD, SADC, IGAD, COMESA and EAC. The aim is to combat child hunger through a solid regional nutrition strategy that encompasses both the main principles of the 'REACH' initiative as well as WFP's own nutrition improvement strategy. The latter pursues the introduction of innovative food fortification options, programmatic nutrition tools and an enhanced general food basket. To drive forward our nutrition agenda in the region, we have constituted a Regional Nutrition Steering Group. This group, consisting of experienced nutritionists, will assist in the contextualisation of the corporate Nutrition Improvement Strategy, preparation of a regional nutrition action plan and development of a platform to share best practices.

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At the request of some governments in the region and NEPAD, WFP is working very closely with governments to prepare for CAADP Round tables and CAADP Compacts in order to ensure that hunger reduction programmes and activities are embedded in them. WFP is committed to providing harmonized support for the country-led agriculture and food security planning processes and investment programmes that are CAADP aligned.

With your continued support, we can rise to the challenge and ensure that the basic food needs of over 30 million vulnerable people in the region are met. But equally importantly, we need your support to step up efforts to reduce vulnerabilities, mitigate the impact of future food crises and improve long-term food security through effective partnerships with governments, regional entities, UN agencies and NGOs.

Thank you very much.