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SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT MALI COUNTRY PORTFOLIO (2003–2009)

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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted to the Executive Board for consideration

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

Mali is a vast country; it is landlocked, half of it is desert and travel is difficult off the main roads. Between 2003 and 2009, WFP implemented 13 operations, often managing 6 operations simultaneously. The school feeding programmes represented nearly 40 percent of the portfolio, followed by food-for-work activities (25 percent) and supplementary feeding programmes (20 percent).

This report evaluates the WFP portfolio in Mali focusing on three questions:

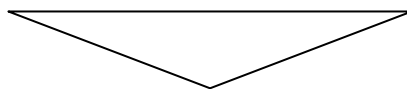
- a) How well did WFP position itself strategically and align with government and partner strategies?
- b) How did WFP make choices, and how strategic were these?
- c) How did the portfolio perform, and what were its results?

The field work took place in June 2010, when a four-member team visited 25 sites. In this challenging environment, subject to numerous crises, the team found that WFP was generally well aligned with the Government's sector policies and strategies relevant to its various programme activities. Through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, WFP's portfolio is well integrated with the United Nations country team; however, in practice this alignment is not effective. WFP has made important contributions to national policies on school feeding programmes and the fight against HIV and AIDS. The choices WFP made were based on frequent food security analyses that influenced geographic targeting and composition of programme activities.

Two major weaknesses observed were the lack of "programme approach" – there is no synergy between activities or operations – and the limited support provided to the decentralization process in Mali. In terms of factors affecting performance, the major problem is the chronic funding deficit. As a consequence, the planned number of beneficiaries and amounts of food to be provided are rarely achieved – with the exception of the school feeding programme. Monitoring has suffered correspondingly and this is one of the main shortcomings of WFP's work in Mali. This has been aggravated by the fact that WFP has worked with a large number of partners, although this is being judiciously addressed.

The evaluation team made 11 recommendations, 4 of them on crosscutting issues and 7 on the sectors nutrition and health, education and school feeding, and rural development and markets. The recommendations take into account the institutional and operational adjustments WFP is in a position to make.

DRAFT DECISION*



The Board takes note of “Summary Evaluation Report Mali Country Portfolio (2003–2009)” (WFP/EB.1/2011/6-A) and the management response (WFP/EB/1/2011/6-A/Add.1) and encourages further action on the recommendations, taking into account considerations raised by the Board during its discussion.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the Decisions and Recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

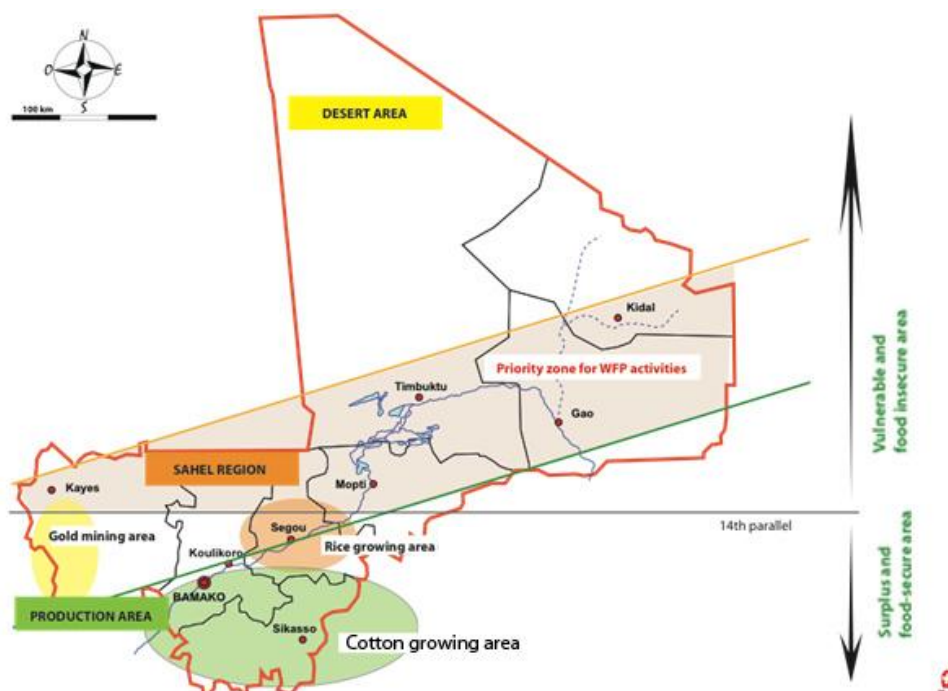
BACKGROUND

Evaluation Features

1. Country portfolio evaluations represent an innovative approach to evaluations for WFP, with Mali being the fifth country out of 77 in which the exercise has been conducted. It is distinctive both for the level of analysis – it does not evaluate each operation individually – and for the length of time covered – seven years, from 2003 to 2009. This combination provides for a better understanding of overall strategies, both internal and external. The evaluation focuses on three questions:
 - How well did WFP position itself strategically and align with government and partner strategies?
 - How did WFP make choices, and how strategic were these?
 - How did the portfolio perform, and what were its results?
2. The evaluation was undertaken by externally recruited consultants, each a specialist in one of the subject areas relevant to the portfolio. The team leader had a more cross-cutting approach. The independence of the mission and its members, along with the Evaluation Quality Assurance System adopted by WFP, ensured that the work would be of high quality.
3. The evaluation entailed a preparatory mission to Bamako in April 2010, a literature review, the preparation of an inception report including an evaluation matrix, field work to 25 sites in Mali in June 2010 that served to discuss with stakeholders (beneficiary groups, cooperating partners, government officials, donors and WFP staff), collect primary and secondary data, and cross-check information. The evaluation faced limitations due to a certain lack of institutional memory in WFP due to staff rotation, limited time in the field, insufficiently standardized monitoring indicators and limited collection/availability of useful monitoring data, delays in accessing information and difficulties in arranging meetings with United Nations agencies.
4. This country portfolio evaluation serves the needs of the Mali country office as it provides new inputs for preparing the country strategy in 2010. It addresses the various stakeholders involved in the country portfolio during the period under consideration: WFP Headquarters, the regional bureau and country office, the Government and major donors, along with cooperating partners and beneficiaries.

Context: Mali, a Poor Country with Strong Potential

Country portfolio evaluation context: Vulnerability and potential of Mali



5. Mali is a vast country of 1,240,000 km². It is landlocked, half of it is desert and travel is difficult off the main roads. Development indicators were very low during the period studied: Mali was 178th out of 182 on the human development index, and food insecurity and poverty rates above the 14th parallel were extremely high (25 percent and 50 percent, respectively), while undernutrition was surprisingly high in the south. In spite of government investments in the education sector – almost 20 percent of the national budget was allocated to education in 2008, of which 37 were spent on primary education – enrolment rates are low, at 80 percent in 2007/08. The adult literacy rate of 26 percent (2006) was also low.
6. During the same period Mali faced a dramatic rise in international grain prices, an influx of refugees from the Côte d'Ivoire and a series of national crises including the effects of the conflict in the north and recurrent droughts, floods and locust infestations.
7. In spite of these challenges, Mali's economy has substantial potential in the primary sector. The country has been self-sufficient in grain for a number of years, and has long been Africa's largest cotton producer and its third largest gold producer. Moreover, the small-farm sector is one of the best organized in the subregion, and Mali's democracy is exemplary. These apparently contradictory elements cast doubt on the relevance of certain international indicators, while also indicating unequal distribution of wealth and difficulty in coping with major sudden-onset crises.

The WFP Portfolio in Mali

8. Between 2003 and 2009, WFP implemented 13 operations. These operations had the following objectives:
 - Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergency situations by addressing the challenges of droughts, locust infestations and the presence of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire.

- Reduce chronic hunger and malnutrition by: i) reducing malnutrition rates among pregnant and lactating women and infants between 6 months and 5 years of age; ii) improving access to education and increasing enrolment rates; and iii) improving the nutritional status of people living with HIV (PLHIV).
 - Rebuild livelihoods of food-insecure population groups by creating durable solutions that reduce the groups' vulnerability to food insecurity.
 - Strengthen government capacities to anticipate and respond to crises.
9. The portfolio comprised four emergency operations, two of them regional; four protracted relief and recovery operations, of which two were regional; three country programmes and two bilateral programmes (the rice project funded by Japan, and Purchase for Progress). Three were already in progress in 2003, ten others were launched during the period and three were still underway after 2009; the country office often managed six operations simultaneously. WFP activities during this period involved the delivery of 215,000 mt of food with a value of US\$160 million to 10 million beneficiaries. The school feeding programmes represented nearly 40 percent of commitments, followed by food-for-work activities (25 percent) and supplementary feeding programmes (20 percent).

PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS

Alignment and Strategic Positioning

10. WFP's work as a whole was found to be well aligned with international strategies – Millennium Development Goals, strategies of the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, and others – and with government policies. WFP's mandate, portfolio and contributions are central to the challenges that Mali faces and fit well with the Government's own response strategies. WFP's portfolio is consistent with the expectations of its partners and of the Government. The country office works within government structures and frameworks in the delivery of its programmes: for example, it worked with the Government to implement in 2006 a multi-sectoral technical pool with a highly dynamic policy, of which it is an active member. Nonetheless, the evaluation found that the country office has not worked fully in the spirit of the Paris Declaration, which calls for greater government ownership; this would require more capacity development work.
11. WFP has maintained a consistent presence during Mali's various crises – refugee influxes, floods, droughts and locust infestations – and there has been good coordination with technical partners and donors. WFP's portfolio is, in principle, well integrated with that of the United Nations country team through the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. However, in practice this alignment is not effective, as WFP tends to work in areas where there are few, if any, partners. Two notable examples exist, however: the “One UN” initiative for which Mali is a pilot and which created new dynamics around joint programmes; and a more recent initiative of the Spanish Cooperation to bring together the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and WFP. Otherwise, the geographical separation of each agency's programmes raises questions about actual synergies that can be attained.

12. The evaluation found WFP was generally well aligned with the Government's sector policies and strategies relevant to its various programme activities:
- **Nutrition.** WFP has supported efforts, both in practical ways and in the conceptual development of framework documents, with respect to nutrition issues in Mali. In the absence of government structures and strategies at the beginning of the evaluation period, WFP articulated its vision and approaches, and provided pragmatic focused assistance where necessary and possible. Its continued presence, both in Bamako and sub-offices throughout the country, established its credibility with partners. Today, there is a nascent national nutrition system in which most of the major stakeholders – including UNICEF and WFP – play a role.
 - **HIV and AIDS.** WFP has played an important role in defining the new government policy and in explaining the importance of nutrition in caring for PLHIV, which also provided WFP an opportunity to work in urban along with rural areas. Its practical role, however, has remained marginal.
 - **Education.** Education activities have been incorporated in the Government's ten-year programme, and have been instrumental in the formulation and implementation of school feeding policy in Mali in 2009.
 - **Rural development.** WFP's activities have been consistent with national priorities: in a country that is 75 percent rural, rural development featured as the top priority in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. How food aid would support these efforts is not mentioned in the strategy nor in the national law on agricultural development, although the law specifies objectives that can be attained with food-for-work and food-for-training activities.
 - **Food security.** WFP's collaboration with the *Commissariat à la sécurité alimentaire* (CSA, Food Security Commission) and its leadership role in the group of technical partners/donors are consistent with WFP's strategy.

Making Strategic Choices

13. The choice of operations and programme activities were influenced by a number of factors. Among them was the availability of frequent food security analyses, conducted by WFP alone or together with partners in 2001, 2002, 2005 and 2008. The analyses shed light on malnutrition and food insecurity issues and their causes, helped interpret national survey data on mother-and-child health (2001 and 2006), and were used in the strategies developed by national stakeholders. WFP also used the analyses to determine both the geographical focus of its programmes and the programme activities. In addition, WFP financed research on appropriate food supplements, which provided a useful base for work by the Government and the World Bank. While the programmes were not immediately successful, they laid the foundation for strategies that are still in use by some non-governmental organizations in some areas. Such work shows that WFP's portfolio focused on malnutrition issues more than other issues, even when project documents mentioned all WFP Strategic Objectives.
14. A drawback of these analyses was that they focused on geographical regions or zones, which led to an approach whereby targeting was aimed at general geographical areas rather than at specific communities or households. Initially, data indicated greatest needs in northern Mali, but gradually food insecurity increased in the south. WFP responded to these needs in 2010 by broadening its geographic focus. The school feeding programme's method for including schools underwent a technical review commissioned by the country

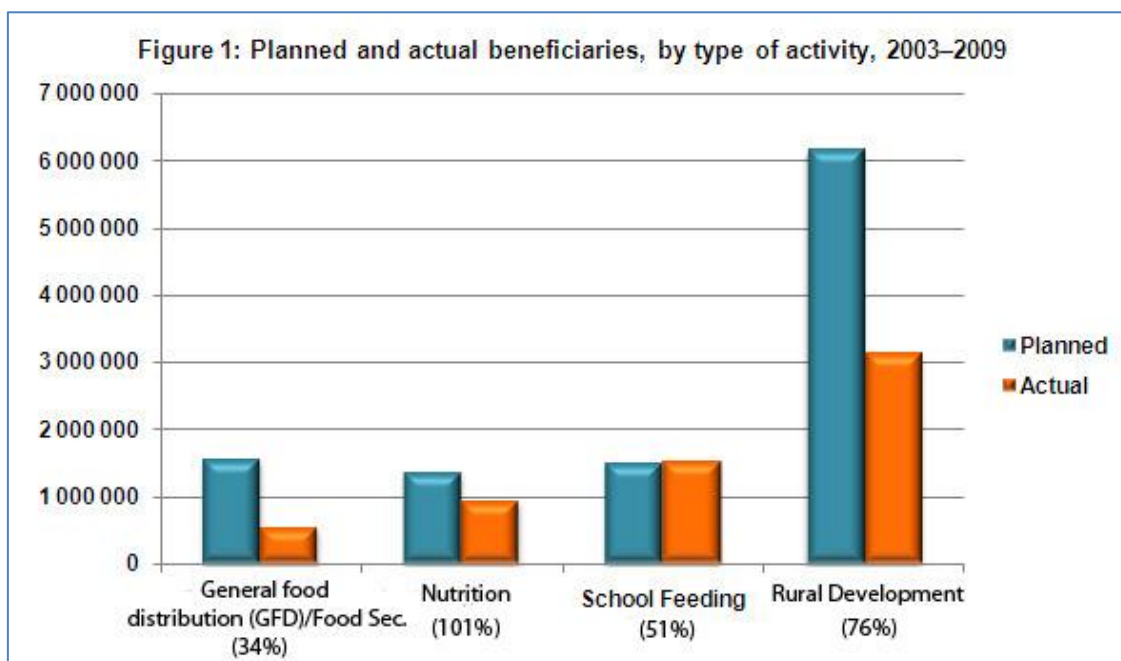
office, which resulted in some changes in school targeting. In contrast, WFP's food-for-work activities depended on partner strategies and presence.

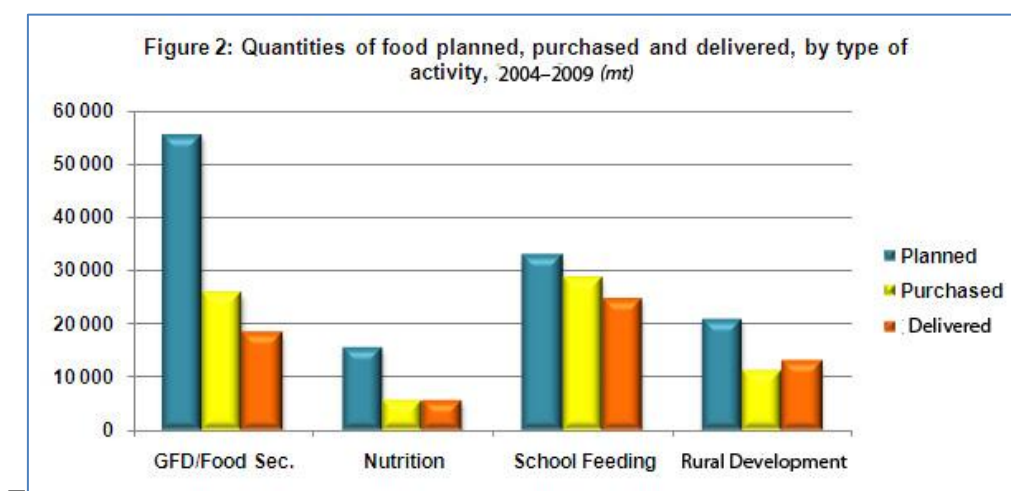
15. WFP works with a large number of partners, which affects monitoring of performance. The choice of partners is determined by their availability in given geographical areas. Larger non-governmental organizations cooperated with WFP only when WFP inputs fit their own programmes, which affected which partners WFP could choose. The gradual shift towards larger partners has been a judicious choice, and has led to: i) more coherent positioning of food for work/training as part of a rural development project, and as a contribution to regional or national objectives; and ii) optimization of monitoring.
16. The evaluation observed several weaknesses: i) the decentralization of WFP education and health activities remains weak at WFP failing to involve local authorities in line with the decentralization process in Mali, which places primary schools and community health under local management; ii) there is no synergy between activities or operations, and so the notion of a "programme approach" is lacking; and iii) the *Direction nationale des projets du PAM* (DNPP, National WFP Projects Office), a vestige of a bygone era, continues to work under its new supervisory entity, the CSA.

Performance and Results

⇒ *Beneficiaries and assistance provided*

17. WFP has rarely been able to achieve the planned number of beneficiaries and ration distribution. The mission concluded that the implementation rate ranged between 34 and 101 percent depending on the type of activity, and between 51 and 76 percent depending on the programme category. Most of the operations did not have strong gender targets built into their designs; when achievements were monitored, they fell below expectations. The highest achievement rates were recorded for school feeding, where the planned number of beneficiaries was reached. The quantities of food distributed were also below the planning figures; see figures 1 and 2 below.





⇒ *Objectives attained*

18. Given the lower number of beneficiaries reached than originally planned, the outcomes of WFP activities fell short of expectations. The absence of good monitoring data made it difficult for the evaluation team to assess the effectiveness of the programmes. In practice, however, certain aspects could be measured, as described below.

- **School feeding.** This is the flagship programme of the portfolio, and its success is universally recognized. Research has shown that enrolment rates are higher for schools in which WFP school feeding is provided, but that there is a stronger impact on enrolment rates when the programme starts up, and then the enrolment rates level off. The enrolment rate increase for girls is higher (13 percent) than the overall average enrolment rate increase (6 percent).
- **Rural development** activities seemed to be adapted to meet immediate food needs: food deliveries during the lean months of August and September were generally timely. The contributions of WFP are integrated with those of partners, and while WFP provides a relatively small input, the joint programme achieves more than if the inputs were delivered in isolation. For instance, the reforestation programme implemented by the Office for Development of the Lake Faguibine system (*Office pour la Mise en Valeur du système Faguibine*, OMVF), has a visible impact on preventing the advancement of desertification. But rural development activities in general not only created fewer assets than planned; even if all assets had been created as planned it is not clear that they would have been sustainable. However, there were examples where assets were sustained thanks to the presence of other partners.
- **The nutrition programme** is so limited in terms of geographical area and number of people reached – especially in relation to the size of the country and the level of need – that any changes in national nutrition data, even if sufficiently detailed and reliable, would not be indicative of the performance of WFP’s nutrition programme. In any case, the overall impact on the nutrition status of the population is not significant. There is no data to measure outcomes of the specific WFP nutrition activities.

19. **Institutional role**, WFP clearly has a major influence on Mali’s education policy, and played a particularly significant role in developing the school feeding policy. It has also made an important contribution to national nutrition and health policy, helping to draft policy documents.

Factors Explaining Results

20. The portfolio suffered from a chronic lack of financial resources (45 percent on average), which made it impossible to reach the planned number of beneficiaries or distribute the planned quantities of food; this in turn affected the extent to which objectives could be attained. Launching operations without secure funding has proved to be problematic and seriously affects operational capacities and results.
21. The large size of the country adds to transport costs and times, including for monitoring missions. The 2009 arrival of a reports officer should result in better information management and reporting, but both long distances and security situations in parts of the country make it difficult and costly to monitor implementation and results. Partners spend limited time on data collection and reporting, and their capacities and means are limited. The lack of monitoring data and the gap between the indicators in the logframe and those actually measured mean that programmes cannot be adjusted in a timely manner and that it is difficult for WFP to demonstrate the results of its food distributions.
22. The country office's work norms for food-for-work (FFW) activities do not always correspond to the actual work performed, which affects the design of the food-for-work schemes. The situation is further compounded by shortfalls in funding, which limit the effectiveness of the activities.
23. In spite of these constraints, the WFP country office worked well, in particular its experienced finance and logistics teams, which prevented pipeline breaks, especially in emergencies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

24. In an institutional environment which, while favourable, is subject to numerous crises and changes, WFP succeeded in developing strategies compatible with the priorities of the Government and of its other partners, and in selecting activities that were appropriate both geographically – focusing on four northern regions – and thematically – focusing on nutrition, education, rural development and food security. WFP has played a major institutional role and has made important contributions to national policies on school feeding programmes and the fight against HIV and AIDS.
25. The choices that WFP made for its portfolio were based on frequent food security analyses that influenced geographic targeting and composition of programme activities. While in line with WFP standards, the resultant geographic targeting of zones did not allow for more precise targeting of communities and households. Changes in data trends were followed with adjustments in the programme. These positive observations were contrasted by the choice to work with a large number of partners, which affected monitoring of performance. Further weaknesses were observed in supporting the decentralization process and working through national institutions and structures in line with the Paris Declaration.
26. In terms of performance, the major problem is the chronic – and growing – funding deficit, although this varies from operation to operation and from one moment to another. As a consequence, the planned number of beneficiaries and amounts of provisions are rarely achieved. Other spending has suffered correspondingly. Monitoring is a case in point and is one of the main shortcomings, on various levels, of WFP work in Mali. The evaluation of outcomes and impact suffered as a result.

Recommendations

27. The following recommendations take into account the institutional and operational adjustments WFP could make.

⇒ *Crosscutting issues*

28. **Recommendation 1:** Optimize fundraising and adapt the scope of activities to the resources available, by for instance:

- reintroducing a hub in Mopti to cover the four northern regions, which would reduce operational costs;
- refocusing operational activities on emergency responses for which donor support exists and providing technical support to the Government in other areas of WFP's competences;
- redesigning FFW activities to work with strong partners to identify opportunities where food assistance can add real value and has secure resources from the outset.

29. **Recommendation 2:** Develop programmes in an integrated way that:

- ensures synergies among programme activities (mother-and-child health, school feeding and rural development), which would entail geographical consolidation and would be more in line with the decentralization efforts of the Government;
- improves the vulnerability analysis and mapping unit capacity to better identify vulnerable beneficiaries at levels lower than the regions;
- re-think the monitoring system (logframes and indicators, adapting them to different situations and capacities) so that it becomes a true management system.

30. **Recommendation 3:** Reconsider WFP's position in the decentralization process, in line with decisions and actions taken in response to recommendation 2.

31. **Recommendation 4:** Make institutional adjustments with the CSA by clarifying roles and responsibilities in relation to the DNPP.

⇒ *Nutrition and health*

32. **Recommendation 5:** Review the WFP nutrition strategy in terms of choice of operations, long-term approach and the hand-over strategy for HIV and AIDS activities.

33. **Recommendation 6:** Participate in research on local complementary foods.

34. **Recommendation 7:** Obtain the financial, logistical and human resources needed to properly identify people suffering from moderate undernutrition and to develop the appropriate tools and strategies.

⇒ *Education and school feeding*

35. **Recommendation 8:** In the schools establish and systematize food-for-training activities, in order to develop the capacities of beneficiary communities, focusing on parents and local officials.

36. **Recommendation 9:** Make a thorough inventory of school feeding programmes, in order to adapt WFP resources to the real situation and adjust expenditures to optimize those resources.

⇒ *Rural development and markets*

37. **Recommendation 10:** Develop bilateral approaches in order to extend development and food-assistance strategies, for example as used by the OMVF project.
38. **Recommendation 11:** Revise the food-for-work norms to more effectively adapt them to realities on the ground.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

CSA	<i>Commissariat à la sécurité alimentaire</i> (Food Security Commission)
DNPP	<i>Direction nationale des projets du PAM</i> (National WFP Projects Office)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFW	food for work
GFD	general food distribution
OMVF	<i>Office pour la Mise en Valeur du système Faguibine</i> (Office for Development of the Lake Faguibine system)
PLHIV	people living with HIV
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund