

برنامج
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Programme
Alimentaire
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World
Food
Programme

Programa
Mundial
de Alimentos

Executive Board
Third Regular Session

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PROGRESS REPORTS

Agenda item 9 f)

PROJECT ECUADOR 3096.01

School feeding programme for improvement of basic education in priority areas

Total food cost	7.4 million dollars
Total cost to WFP	9.8 million dollars
Date approved by the CFA	27 May 1994
Date plan of operations signed	24 February 1995
Date notification of readiness accepted	3 March 1995
Date of first distribution	1 December 1995
Duration of WFP assistance	Three years
Duration of project as at 28 February 1997	Fifteen months

All monetary values are expressed in United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.
One United States dollar equalled 3,720 sucres in February 1997.



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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted for consideration to the Executive Board.

Pursuant to the decisions taken on the methods of work by the Executive Board at its First Regular Session of 1996, the documentation prepared by the Secretariat for the Board has been kept brief and decision-oriented. The meetings of the Executive Board are to be conducted in a business-like manner, with increased dialogue and exchanges between delegations and the Secretariat. Efforts to promote these guiding principles will continue to be pursued by the Secretariat.

The Secretariat therefore invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document, to contact the WFP staff member(s) listed below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting. This procedure is designed to facilitate the Board's consideration of the document in the plenary.

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PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND OF WFP ASSISTANCE

- 1 The long-term objective of the project is to contribute to improving the quality and efficiency of basic education in poverty-affected areas.
2. The project's immediate objectives are to:
 - a) encourage the regular attendance at primary schools in priority areas of children from poor families;
 - b) provide a food supplement to relieve short-term hunger, thereby improving the learning capacity of primary school children; and
 - c) support the educational system by establishing an effective school feeding programme, that can be continued by the Government.
3. The outputs that the project aims to achieve are as follows:
 - a) a decrease in the rate of absenteeism among beneficiary children from 30 to 15 percent.
 - b) the provision of breakfast for 500,000 children during the 160 days of the academic year for three years, i.e., a total of 240,000,000 rations.
 - c) an effective school feeding programme to benefit 500,000 children that will be taken over by the Government. In addition the School Feeding Unit within the Ministry of Education and Culture will be strengthened.

IMPLEMENTATION

- 4 The first phase of the project (1990-93) was implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture through the Operational Unit of School Feeding (OUSF). During this period, the several changes of authority within the Ministry and in the project management affected the implementation of the project. An evaluation conducted by WFP, with the participation of FAO and UNESCO, found that the project's impact had been limited largely because of irregular administration. The evaluation mission recommended that WFP assistance should continue because of the problems faced by the beneficiary population and the current situation in the country. However, a new project should be designed to avoid the technical and administrative problems encountered during the first phase.
5. The Government accepted the mission's recommendations and this second phase has been designed to be implemented by the OUSF with UNDP's technical assistance. The OUSF is in charge of the planning, programming, monitoring and control of operations related to the achievement of project objectives. A Project Management Unit (PMU), established in cooperation with UNDP, is in charge of management and administration (contracting with the processing plants for the preparation of biscuits and drinks, and arranging for tenders, distribution, payments to suppliers and quality control).
6. The OUSF is formed by a national coordinator, a finance officer, an accountant, an accounting clerk, a logistics officer, three food monitors and two secretaries. At the school level, parents' associations, in collaboration with school directors and teachers, receive the food commodities and collaborate in their preparation and distribution to the children, as well as providing additional food commodities such as condiments and fresh vegetables.

7. The PMU operates from the UNDP premises and consists of a principal technical assistant (PTA); three consultants in food technology and management, monitoring, and administration; a systems analyst; a secretary; six field supervisors; and four support staff (drivers, messengers).

FOOD MANAGEMENT

8. As at 28 February 1997, WFP has delivered 13,740 tons of food to the project, or 58 percent of the commitment (see Annex I). The skimmed milk and part of the wheat flour were delivered to three private contractors for the preparation of the breakfast which consists of a nutritious drink and biscuits. The contractors prepare, pack and deliver the food to the schools every 30 or 60 days, depending on the accessibility of the schools.
9. Part of the wheat flour was monetized at an average price of 330 dollars a ton. The wheat was also monetized at a price of 205 dollars a ton. The proceeds are to be used to purchase local cereals (quinoa flour, oat or rice flour, defatted soya flour) and sugar to be added to the drink. During this initial stage of the project, Government funds provided for processing, packing and other purposes have been used to purchase local food products (see Annex I).
10. In the schools the parents, in coordination with teachers, prepare the drink by adding hot water and flavours to the cereal mix and distribute it to the children early in the morning, together with three biscuits for each child. The field supervisors visit the schools every month (approximately 600 schools a month) to evaluate the efficiency of the food delivery and its preparation.

GOVERNMENT'S CONTRIBUTION

11. The project summary indicates that the Government contribution to the project during the three-year period should be 12 million dollars. However, during the negotiation of the plan of operations it was indicated that 27 million dollars should be provided for staff costs, local food processing, packing, transport, materials, equipment monitoring and evaluation (M&E), auditing, etc. As at 28 February 1997, the Government had provided to UNDP 8.3 million dollars, which is 80 percent of the planned contribution up to this date. This timely and important contribution demonstrates that the Government has already assumed greater responsibility for, and substantial commitment to, the programme. The utilization breakdown of 7.7 million dollars (71 percent) of this contribution is given in Annex II.

EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

12. A publication on how to prevent diseases caused by eating contaminated food was designed and distributed by the project, with the support of the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO). The publication is available in Spanish and Quechua. UNESCO participated in the baseline study and UNDP provides technical assistance in logistics and management. Some of the schools in the project area are also included in the development plan of the two education projects financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (PROMECEB) and the World Bank (EB/PRODEC), which aim to ameliorate the

quality of basic education by improving the curriculum, administration and infrastructure in rural and urban schools and by developing human resources in the education sector.

13. Norway has donated 300,000 dollars for the purchase of non-food items. To date, 1,500 improved stoves, 3,000 pots, 3,000 ladles, 7,000 measuring jugs and 550,000 drinking cups have been purchased and distributed to the participating schools. An additional 50,000 dollars was provided to develop an M&E system.

ASSESSMENT

14. The M&E system for the projects was designed in close coordination with the Ministry of Education and UNDP. It includes a baseline study prepared during this initial phase. The study found that the children in the highlands of the country (sierra) have a food deficit of 600 kilocalories a day, lack calcium and vitamin A, and together with their families experience a high level of food insecurity during the rainy and planting season.
15. The school breakfast provides 20 percent of the children's food requirements, and acts as an incentive to attend school regularly. The study also found that there are no significant differences between boys and girls in learning abilities.
16. The method established for the selection of beneficiaries has proved to be very effective. It is based on technical and socio-economic criteria provided by the National System of Food and Nutrition Surveillance, the height census, and regional poverty maps. Schools with the highest poverty, malnutrition and education deficiency indexes have been selected which are located mainly in the highlands and in rural areas. However, some urban schools whose pupils suffer from severe problems of malnutrition are also included in the project. Schools were selected in close coordination with the Catholic Church Bishops Conference Project, financed mainly by the European Union, which provides primary school lunches. However, during the project's first year of operation, the Government insisted on including some schools in Guayas Province which had not originally been selected.
17. A comparison between the project's achieved objectives and outputs demonstrates that the project is performing well (see below). The private enterprises that manufacture the drink and the biscuits have developed a distribution system that ensures the arrival of the food in time even to the most distant schools. Delivery is carried out by donkey, canoe, car, and small aircraft to schools located in the Amazonian region.

COMPARISON OF TARGETS AND ACHIEVEMENTS
(as at 28 February 1997)

Outputs	According to plan of operations	Planned	Actual as at 28.02.97	Percentage of achievement
Boys and girls receiving meals	500 000	500 000	490 680	98
Teachers receiving meals	-	-	19 120	
Schools covered	7 000	7 000	6 233	89
Biscuits distributed	240 000 000	100 000 000	73 788 439	74
Drink distributed	240 000 000	100 000 000	65 133 830	65
Days per year	160	160	152	95
Government contribution	26 991 733	10 496 785	8 342 377	81

18. It was not possible to measure quantitatively the reduction of absenteeism among the schoolchildren participating in the project, because the information reported by the school directors on children's attendance was often distorted and incomplete. In order to provide more accurate information, a new method is being developed for this school year which involves a selection of representative schools where the relevant indicators will be measured. However, reports of field visits and information provided by parents, teachers and children indicate that the project had a positive effect in encouraging more regular school attendance, and that the children had an improved attention span during classes and increased physical activity.
19. It is important to emphasize the role played by women in food preparation, management and decision-making within project activities. Women are particularly conscious of the benefits the project provides for their children and are very active participants in school activities. Parent/teacher associations are active in the management and preparation of the food commodities, and provide spices as well as gas for the stoves to reduce firewood consumption. Furthermore, parents associations, have built kitchens and small storerooms in some schools which lacked these facilities.
20. Several information activities have been developed in the form of project promotional material such as posters which were distributed to all schools, and a video distributed to the provincial authorities and the media. A Manual of Project Procedures has been prepared and training provided for counterpart staff.
21. The technical assistance provided by UNDP through the Government-funded PMU has ensured better overall project performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

22. The nutritious breakfast provided to schoolchildren complements their inadequate diet and encourages more regular school attendance.
23. The project targets the poorest schoolchildren in areas with a high incidence of poverty and malnutrition.

24. Food distribution is difficult because the schools are located in remote areas. However, the contracted enterprises have developed several mechanisms to overcome this problem and rations are distributed in time. At the same time, PMU's supervision of the participating companies ensures better control.
25. Community participation is active but could be improved in schools located in urban areas of the coastal provinces. Supervision of these schools should be increased.
26. The baseline study revealed that parents and teachers in remote areas have insufficient knowledge of the project. Information activities should increase in these areas.
27. Coordination should be strengthened at the local level with the projects being developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture with the financial support of the World Bank and the IDB.
28. The new methodology for monitoring the rate of absenteeism and regular attendance in selected schools should be finalized, in order to substitute the original information database which has proved to be ineffective.
29. Training of the OUSF by the PMU should be increased at the central and provincial level, in order to ensure that the Ministry of Education assume more and more responsibility for the project. Terms of reference for a consultancy, financed by the Government, to establish a management plan have been prepared and are under consideration by the Ministry of Education.
30. Information related to the nutritional status of the schoolchildren should be collected at the end of every school year, in order to assess more accurately the project's impact.
31. The selection criteria adopted for the project should be firmly maintained and the programming adjusted accordingly.

ANNEX I

UTILIZATION OF FOOD (to 28 February 1997)					
Commodity	Commitment	Revised ¹ Commitment	Supplied	Distributed	Monetized
Dried skimmed milk	1 560	1 560	578	423	-
Wheat flour	6 960	7 165	7 187	4 428	2 716
Wheat flour for monetization/ exchange	14 600	-	-	-	-
Wheat		14 750	5 600	-	5 600
Canned fish		109	-	-	-
Total	23 120	23 584	13 740	4 851	8 316

¹ The food basket was revised according to the availability of food products.

MONETIZATION			
Product	Quantity (tons)	Cost per ton (dollars)	Proceeds (dollars)
Wheat flour	2 716	330	896 633
Wheat	5 600	205	1 148 000

ANNEX II

UTILIZATION OF THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTRIBUTION <i>(in dollars)</i>
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Object of expenditure	Total committed	Planned as of 28/2/97	Utilized	Percentage
Staff costs	1 414 1	589 375	233 876	40
Local food purchases, processing, packing, transport to schools	22 153 1	8 615	6 453	75
Port charges, storage, handling, transport	1 162 1	480 094	438 250	91
Equipment, office supplies and canteen infrastructure improvement	688 000	465 750	93 331	20
Quality control of food ration	15 000	5 000	2 848	57
Training	15 000	5 000	3 738	75
Auditing	20 000	-	2 400	-
Project management by UNDP	1 344 1	504 868	409 275	81
Technical assistance	108 000	36 000	-	-
Monitoring	15 000	5 000	-	-
Tendering/others	59 000	29 000	35 804	123
Total	26 993 1	10 735	7 673	71