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COUNTRY STRATEGY OUTLINES

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MAURITANIA CSO

ABSTRACT

Mauritania has received WFP assistance since 1964, a time when the country had not yet suffered the periods of severe drought which created the migration flows towards the capital.

Given the Government's priorities of addressing the problems of poverty and food insecurity, and in consideration of the results achieved from development projects and emergency operations, WFP now proposes to direct its assistance towards rural areas with a population of 900,000 poor or very poor people by targeting those subject to food insecurity. As far as possible, food aid will serve to alleviate the effects of any future droughts by supporting small-scale works to improve food production infrastructure and the management of natural resources by rural communities.

In the same way, based on the principle that lack of education is a deciding factor of poverty, WFP proposes to provide support to human resources by targeting schoolchildren receiving basic education (especially girls) in six regions where the school enrolment rate is still low.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Except for an irrigated sector concentrated in the river region and some semi-urban market gardening belts, in the last 30 years Mauritanian agriculture and animal husbandry have been seriously affected by some fairly long periods of drought alternating with frequent locust attacks. The result has been chronic food insecurity which has led people living in areas with an unfavourable climate (the northern pastoral areas and oases) to migrate to the towns - in particular to Nouakchott, which has one of the highest rates of population growth in West Africa - and, to a lesser extent, to the south (the river region), where the development of the irrigated rice-growing areas constituted a real alternative solution.
2. Socio-demographic changes are reflected, among other things, in a) an almost total abandonment of traditional oasis agriculture; b) important changes in the practice of animal husbandry - in 1995 the nomadic population accounted for only 10 percent of the population as against 73 percent in 1965; and c) a concentration of people around the secondary towns, in particular along the "route de l'Espoir" (the main road between Nouakchott and Néma), which is often a temporary settlement stage before settling in the capital.
3. The Government of Mauritania has been paying particular attention to the precarious food and social/health status of these people. On the one hand, it has initiated a policy of support to the agricultural sector (development of irrigated areas, support to cereal production, rationalization of food aid, support/reorganization of bodies working in the field of food security) and, on the other hand, has confirmed its political will to fight this problem through a series of studies on the structure and profile of poverty.

FOOD INSECURITY AND POVERTY

Food insecurity at the national level

Main indicators

4. According to the Human Development Report (UNDP, 1995), Mauritania has an average per capita GDP of 435 dollars,¹ a life expectancy at birth of 51 years, an infant mortality rate of 101 per 1,000, an adult literacy rate of 36 percent (25 percent in the case of women), a school enrolment rate of 71 percent and access to health services of 52 percent. As a result, the country is classified 150th out of the 174 countries under consideration. Looking at criteria chosen by the World Bank in 1990 for the definition of poverty (an average level of annual expenditure under 370 dollars constitutes poverty and under 275 dollars extreme poverty), 45 percent of the total population lives below the extreme poverty line and for this reason constitutes the target population that WFP should assist.

¹ All monetary values are expressed in United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.



Agricultural production and food situation

5. Following the great drought of 1972/73, Mauritania became a country with a structural food deficit. Cereal output (irrigated rice and rainfed millet-sorghum) fluctuates between 75,000 and 140,000 tons which, in good years, only covers 40 percent of cereal requirements. The cereal balance sheets of the last six years indicate that: a) the gross deficits fluctuated between 163,431 tons (1989/90) and 321,794 tons (1992/93); b) the food output index for this period (1989-95) stabilized at 82 percent compared with the period 1978-82 (base 100); and c) the food dependency rate (including all food products) rose from 33.4 percent in 1970 to 59.4 percent in 1990. The medium-term forecasts of the Ministry of Rural Development confirm Mauritania's structural deficit in cereal products.
6. To compensate for this deficit, Mauritania, together with its development partners, including WFP, is committed to a vast programme of hydro-agricultural development in the region of the Senegal river valley and its tributaries (Gorgol). In the meantime, food security can only be assured by recourse to food aid and commercial imports, in particular of rice. During the last six years, cereal imports, fluctuating between 160,000 tons in 1989/90, 280,000 tons in 1991/92 and 176,000 tons in 1994/95 have covered a large part of food requirements - more than 50 percent in 1994. Furthermore, the food aid portion, mainly wheat, covered between eight and 19.6 percent of requirements. This food aid, in its different forms - emergency aid, food for work (FFW) within the framework of development activities and monetized aid - is channelled and managed by the Food Security Commission (CSA) set up by the Government many years ago.
7. Since 1994 annual rainfall has improved and consequently emergency aid has been very much reduced, while assistance to development projects has steadily increased, accounting for 84 percent of total food aid in 1995 (23,280 out of 27,745 tons). Lastly, liberalization of the markets and the recent introduction of a tax on commercial imports of cereals created the right conditions to encourage cereal production, while still allowing the private sector to play its role in supplying the cereal markets.

Food security at the regional level

8. Of Mauritania's 13 administrative regions, five do not produce any cereals (Adrar, Inchiri, Dakhlet Nouadhibou, Tiris Zemmour and Nouakchott). The other eight (Hodh Chargui, Hodh Gharbi, Assaba, Tagant, Gorgol, Brakna, Trarza and Guidimakha), with agro-pastoral land use, all have cereal deficits, even in years with a normal level of rainfall. The greatest agricultural potential is concentrated in these eight regions which produce more than 70 percent of the country's cereals. The rate of cover of cereal requirements varies from seven to 82 percent depending on how much irrigated land has been developed. Eighty-five percent of the population of these eight regions is composed of farmers and herdsmen who have no direct access to the irrigated lands; they are in a precarious situation and could benefit from WFP assistance.
9. Mauritanian agriculture has become extremely vulnerable to periods of drought and is heavily conditioned by the amount of rainfall (25 millimetres in the north,



485 millimetres in the south; two thirds of the territory receives less than 100 millimetres on average). The major battle now is to establish sustainable solutions by intensifying irrigated agriculture and allowing people who have left the deprived areas and are in a precarious situation to take their place in the fabric of the national economy. Food aid is still one of the few means of reducing both structural and temporary food deficits and of supporting investments for long-term development.

Poverty

Identification of the Mauritanian poor

10. Since the Government has included the fight against poverty amongst its priorities, WFP proposes to contribute by targeting its assistance to 900,000 people classified as very poor.
11. The permanent study on household living conditions (1988-90) showed that poverty is predominant in rural areas. About 30 percent of the population lives in the capital (1995); of the rest, 59 percent are classified as very poor. In the special case of the area known as "rural river" (south Trarza, south Brakna, Gorgol and Guidimakha), with a strong agricultural potential, annual family expenditure stands at 24,500 ouguiyas (UM) (185 dollars) and the head of household is either unemployed or non-working or a self-employed small farmer.
12. The study on the profile of poverty carried out in 1991/92 by the Ministry of Planning, divided by socio-economic group, confirmed the predominance of poverty in rural areas and outlying urban areas. In fact, self-employed small farmers account for the highest percentage of the poor (74 percent) and the very poor (60 percent), followed by the unemployed (56 and 43 percent), the non-working population (53 and 42 percent) and the non-farming self-employed (42 and 28 percent). Poverty particularly affects those households headed by women (a very high proportion in north Brakna).
13. Living in a rural environment and around the centres of migration, 900,000 people classified as poor or very poor are eligible to receive WFP assistance. Despite high transport costs and increasing international commodity prices, food aid is fully justified and can play a deciding role in development activities leading to increased output in isolated, remote regions where food is not always available (see paragraph 50).

Factors determining poverty

14. The large migration flows caused by successive droughts have accentuated people's vulnerability and worsened their living conditions which the traditional solidarity networks are inadequate to restore. In the rural environment, problems in obtaining credit, water and land have forced those who migrated to the agricultural south to work in difficult and unstable conditions. In the urban context, a low level of education and few stable salaried jobs have forced people into the informal sector where jobs are precarious and poorly paid. Working conditions together with the lack of a social/health infrastructure have helped to generalize poverty.



15. Women account for 50.8 percent of the Mauritanian population (1988 census). At the national level, 23 percent of heads of household are women and this percentage rises to 46.6 percent for farming families. In the agricultural and pastoral sector, women take part in collective work and individually cultivate farming lots (mainly market gardens) or raise animals (small ruminants, poultry), thus contributing to the family income. The fact remains that the above-mentioned factors also apply in full to the specific jobs done by women. Furthermore, the field of activities for women is seriously limited by their low level of literacy, the cumulative burden of housework and any productive activities, the inherent risks of market gardening (preservation, outlets), and difficulties in obtaining specific credit or mobilizing labourers.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES AND POLICIES TO COMBAT POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY

General policies

16. Since 1985, the Government of Mauritania has been engaged in the medium-term adjustment and structural reform programmes supported by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These programmes have led to improvements in the main macro-economic indicators, better control of inflation, help in the process of liberalizing the economy, a return to competitiveness as regards Mauritanian products and exports, and the achievement of an appreciable rate of growth (4.9 percent in 1993).
17. For the period 1994-96, the main government priorities are to consolidate the gains made from the adjustment efforts by: a) developing human resources, especially in the fields of education and health; b) protecting the environment through the participation of local and regional groups in the management of their natural resources; c) developing the rural sector through the intensification of agriculture and animal husbandry, curbing the rural exodus and involving the people in decisions that directly concern them; d) supporting food security and the fight against poverty taking into account the social aspects of adjustment. From an institutional point of view, the Ministry of Planning is responsible for drawing up and coordinating policy and measures to combat poverty, whose implementation depends on the various technical ministries involved.
18. In order to facilitate the necessary interaction between the various sectoral priorities (health, education, agricultural production) and the fight against poverty, the Government has structured its action strategy around two main themes: social - to improve people's access to the basic social infrastructures and services, and economic - to favour job creation and a growth in earnings.
19. In both the rural and the urban environments, this strategy is based on carrying out productive projects or projects of public interest initiated by rural people, local community groups, socio-professional associations or organizations and the public services. These projects concern, amongst other things, agricultural production (rehabilitation, development of land for farming, oasis cultivation, promotion of short-cycle animal husbandry, etc.), rural infrastructure (tracks, warehouses),



social/health infrastructure (schools, community clinics, etc.), village and pastoral water engineering, water-supplies in rural villages and secondary towns, drainage works, the collection and processing of domestic waste, large urban infrastructure work sites, activities for the protection and management of the environment (plantations, dune-fixing, prevention of sand encroachment, etc.). Given the value of the food and therefore its comparative advantage, WFP food aid in the form of food for work (FFW) is highly suited to this type of development activity where the mobilization of whole communities is needed.

Education

20. As regards education, in order to improve the school enrolment rate (45 percent in 1989/90, 71 percent in 1993/94), the Government has allocated 20 percent of its national budget to this sector for the period 1995-2000. With support from several donors, its objectives are to increase access to primary education, especially in rural areas, and to develop an effective system of technical education suited to the needs of the job market. The construction of classrooms (with the involvement of the local people) and the creation of school canteens are vital to the achievement of these objectives.

Health

21. As far as health is concerned, cover is still poor despite the Government's efforts to develop primary health care, information campaigns, education, communications, epidemiological monitoring and the improvement of blood transfusion services. The mortality rate is 19 per 1,000. In addition, recent nutrition studies show that: i) anaemia is commonplace and there is a serious vitamin A deficiency; ii) malnutrition affects 44 percent of the child population, of which eight percent are classified as suffering from acute malnutrition; iii) the isolated, remote areas of the country and the outlying districts of the large towns present many cases of severe malnutrition. The Government has drawn up a national action plan for nutrition (PNAN) to improve the situation.

Promotion of women

22. The policy for the promotion of women assigned to a specific ministerial office involves improving women's working conditions, giving them a greater say in local development and adopting a family policy. Although women are already involved in most of the development activities eligible for WFP assistance (see above), direct support to women's initiatives (farming, small-scale animal husbandry, processing of agricultural produce, cottage industries, and setting up support networks for savings and loans) might well be envisaged and warranted.



Food security

23. For many years, policy regarding food security has been the responsibility of the Food Security Commission (CSA) which was set up by the Government as the sole public body to oversee all missions regarding cereal trading and food aid. In 1992 the CSA's mandate was redefined around the following tasks: channelling food aid intended for sale into the markets; organizing and supervising the free distributions in the event of structural or temporary food deficits; promoting grass-roots projects benefiting from WFP's FFW programme; buying up any agricultural surpluses when the markets are disrupted or inoperative; building up and managing reserve stocks, especially in the isolated, remote regions; and setting up and running a central information system on cereal trading.
24. An improvement in climatic conditions since 1993 has reduced the need for emergency aid; national cereal output has stabilized at around 140,000 tons a year and cereal imports (rice, wheat, flour and millet) at around 180,000 tons, i.e., 60 percent of market supply. Donors also reduced their programme aid and so CSA activities moved towards managing assistance to development projects and operations for refugees coming from Mali. Since the CSA's operating costs are charged to the counterpart funds of programme aid, this development has caused the CSA serious budgetary problems.

Food aid

25. Food aid policy is therefore moving steadily towards targeted assistance to FFW development activities and projects, with a consequent reduction in emergency aid (see Annex). Some donors of food aid to Mauritania were not convinced that the FFW programmes were a suitable response to food insecurity and they have preferred to support the development of the private sector (especially in the towns), which creates jobs and income, thus allowing market forces to operate.
26. For WFP, this strategy must be qualified. The distribution of food under FFW development activities has an important role to play in rural and/or isolated, remote areas where the markets do not operate efficiently and where food is not available. Moreover, food aid must not be considered as payment for a temporary job of work but as an incentive for village or pastoral communities facing a food deficit to take part in structural investments which will eventually improve their food security and living conditions.
27. The reduction in programme food aid (see Annex I) on the part of some donor countries has undoubtedly been motivated by the dominating role of the CSA and a lukewarm appraisal of some of its achievements (monitoring and evaluation, for example). The Joint Committee for Food Planning (CPA), which was created to maintain a permanent dialogue between the various donors and the Government, has been judged by some donors insufficiently operational in practice.



ASSESSMENT OF WFP'S PERFORMANCE TO DATE

28. Between 1964 and 1995, the total value of WFP aid was 139 million dollars. WFP has assisted the development of human resources (since 1964), emergency operations for drought victims (since 1969) and rural development (since 1971). Between 1969 and 1992, the value of emergency aid operations rose to 53 million dollars; the total budget for ongoing projects in 1995 accounted for 27.2 million dollars, of which 5.9 million for a project to assist Malian refugees, with a FFW component for the host population.

Assistance to the school canteens programme: Mauritania 055 (Exp.6)

29. WFP assistance to the education sector dates back to 1964 and, save the ongoing project, represents 10.74 million dollars. The main objective has always been to increase the school enrolment rate. In the sixties, since the population was mainly composed of nomads, the aid meant the Government could make grants to boarders at secondary schools and create 30 school canteens in primary schools. In 1991, at the end of the fifth expansion of this project, 101 primary schools (of which 40 in the Trarza region) and nine secondary boarding-schools were receiving WFP assistance.
30. This project, which began in 1991 at a cost of 13.89 million dollars over a period of five years, had already reached 40,000 primary school children after four years. WFP places its assistance under the national strategy for education by helping people settled in the rural environment.
31. The project has provided a balanced diet for children aged from six to 12 years in the rural environment, encouraged a regrouping of schools to facilitate deliveries and reduced the costs to be borne by the communities. It has thus made a large contribution to the spectacular increase in the school enrolment rate since 1990 (45 percent in 1990, 71 percent in 1994).
32. The monetization of wheat generated 138 million UM (about 1,045,000 dollars), of which 60 percent was used to build school infrastructure (28 refectories, 29 latrines, eight water tanks and seven boreholes as at 30 June 1995), and also served to cover teacher training (1,530 teachers and 69 inspectors) in the fields of health and nutrition education. Part of these funds (30 million UM) has been invested at a rate of five percent over six months since November 1994. This balance has permitted the continuance of the training programme and creation of infrastructure in the south and south-west where the school enrolment rate is lowest.
33. The main weaknesses of this project, which has received technical assistance from three United Nations volunteers (UNVs) financed by UNDP, are to be found firstly in the insufficient mobilization of the planned cash counterpart fund on the part of the parents of the schoolchildren and/or the communes and, secondly, in the Ministry of Education's (MEN) capabilities in managing and monitoring the implementation structure. A technical review mission was scheduled for January 1996 with instructions to study the request for a further phase targeting the regions where



the general school enrolment rate (and in particular that of girls) is the lowest and where poverty is rife. The Ministry is committed to starting up a monitoring and evaluation system as a result of a study financed by WFP in 1995.

Multi-purpose development project: Mauritania 2822 (Exp.1)

34. The previous phase of this project, approved in 1987 for a period of five years, had nine components. The present phase, approved in 1992 at a cost of 7.33 million dollars and a duration of four years and nine months, commenced in the second half of 1992. Its aim is to improve the living conditions of rural people and the urban poor engaged in community development activities. It contains three sub-projects implemented by three different institutional bodies: the first sub-project (48 percent of the commitment), dealing with small-scale works, is implemented by the CSA; the second (38 percent of the commitment), dealing with activities for safeguarding the environment, is implemented by the Department of the Environment and Rural Growth (DEAR), which is part of the Ministry for Rural Development and the Environment (MDRE); and the third (14 percent of the commitment), dealing with urban development, is implemented by the town councils of Nouakchott and Nouadhibou.
35. The FFW programmes were set up where there was the greatest need, that is, in the regions with a chronic food deficit and for people with no resources in rural areas. This explains the large number of small-scale works aiming to: rehabilitate water engineering works (dikes, wells, small dams); develop rice-growing, market gardening or pastoral areas; fix dunes; regenerate oasis agriculture and forest plantations; construct infrastructure for social purposes (schools and health centres), transport (rural tracks) or economic infrastructure (warehouses, silos, threshing areas, etc.) and carry out drainage and urban road-works.
36. At the local level, people's involvement in the different stages of decision-making and implementation of the various activities makes the communities responsible for their own affairs. This positive will to encourage and consolidate local dynamics is, however, hampered by some of the public authorities (technical departments and the CSA) owing to the centralized final decision-making for project approval. Furthermore, the CSA's budgetary problems are slowing down the approval procedure and making technical support and monitoring and evaluation of the projects more difficult.
37. The successful outcome of the small-scale works also depends on the availability of non-food inputs which have been given to the CSA by Japan (counterpart fund) and Canada. Moreover, the CSA enjoys UNDP support in the form of six UNVs working under this project.
38. The two main towns - Nouakchott and Nouadhibou - were accepted for the third sub-project because of their high population density and high rates of unemployment and poverty, particularly in the outlying districts, and also the basic infrastructure which is virtually non-existent. Despite the late arrival of the non-food inputs required to carry out the work, this sub-project managed to create 600,000 workdays for unskilled workers.



39. A monetization component envisages the sale of 13,905 tons of wheat divided up as follows: 8,005 tons to cover the costs of internal transport, storage and handling (ITSH) and 5,900 tons to pay for non-food inputs. As at October 1995, 7,713 tons had been sold for 192,825,000 UM (1,460,795 dollars), of which 53,214,000 UM were used to reimburse the ITSH costs and 30 million UM had been put in a bank account at an interest rate of five percent.
40. The technical review mission planned for 1996 has been instructed, amongst other things, to carry out the following tasks: a) to study ways of improving the networks and procedures for the selection and approval of the small-scale works; b) to propose the establishment of a working system of monitoring and evaluation; c) to examine the role and cost-effectiveness of the monetization component and its usefulness in paying the ITSH costs and purchasing the non-food inputs which are essential to the success of the project.

Emergency aid to drought victims: Mauritania 5104 (Exp.1)

41. Since 1969, the only solution to the problem of food deficits caused by drought has been emergency aid.
42. Approved in January 1993, this project, costing 10.3 million dollars, should be the last in a long series given that weather conditions have improved since 1993. This emergency operation aimed to provide 420,000 hungry people with cereal rations for 120 days over a period of one year. The letter of understanding set out the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries and the numbers to benefit in each department and region. These criteria, established by the CSA according to the severity of the situation and the degree of food insecurity, have sometimes been modified by the local authorities who are better able to determine the target populations according to the actual situation and working of the traditional solidarity networks.
43. The total commitment of 24,390 tons of cereals was delivered in three tranches, of which the first two (10,114 tons, i.e., 41.4 percent of the commitment), delivered from the start of 1993 on, brought relief to the target populations at the right time. The third tranche (14,276 tons of red sorghum, i.e., 58.6 percent of the commitment) could only be delivered after the 1993 lean period and was not available at the extended delivery points until December 1993. As a result, in agreement with WFP, part of the last tranche was used as a reserve for intervention in the isolated, remote regions to cover needs as and when they arose. The remaining amount was distributed during the lean period of June 1995.
44. The implementation of this project clearly poses the problem of delays in delivering emergency aid. Moreover, the effectiveness of some operations (strict monitoring system and consultation mechanisms for the allocation of remainders) remains to be demonstrated.



Assistance to refugees from northern Mali

45. Conflicts in northern Mali provoked an influx of Moors and Tuaregs into Mauritania. The Peace Conference held in Timbuktu in July 1995 marked the end of the crisis and established conditions for the return of the refugees to their places of origin.
46. WFP humanitarian assistance was given to three operations: an emergency operation in 1992/93 which distributed 10,530 tons of food valued at 5.32 million dollars and a protracted refugee operation (PRO) Mauritania 5413, plus expansion. Since March 1994, the WFP commitment amounts to 20,629 tons at a total cost of 10.38 million dollars.
47. The first phase of project Mauritania 5413, costing 4.4 million dollars, provided food to 5,000 refugees and supplies to six school canteens in the camps. In the space of a few months in 1994, the number of refugees rose to 77,000 and the resources intended to last for 12 months were quickly used up. A second phase of project Mauritania 5413 (Exp. 1) was therefore approved on 26 January 1995 at a cost of 5.9 million dollars (including budgetary revisions) for an estimated target population of 80,000 refugees; this figure was reduced to 42,000 following the April 1995 census. In August of the same year and following a study carried out in June 1995 which indicated a deterioration in the nutritional status of women and children, WFP readjusted the composition of the individual rations and 552 tons of commodities were allocated to the small-scale works (prevention of sand encroachment) carried out by the host population. Furthermore, the supply of food to the school canteens in the camps was continued.
48. The return of the refugees to Mali depends on restoring a climate of confidence and the organization of a relief framework (rehabilitation of wells and basic infrastructure and help with resettlement). A certain number of refugees might therefore choose to stay on in the Mauritanian relief camps. For 1996, WFP foresees a third phase for 38,000 refugees.

Bilateral services - monitoring unit for the free distributions

49. Since 1991, a temporary unit of the WFP office has followed about 10 bilateral emergency food aid operations. Through its direct participation with the Government in the assessment of needs, drafting distribution plans, and in programming, controlling and monitoring the quantities distributed, the monitoring unit has allowed WFP and the donors to get a better grasp of the situation in the field. This unit could be maintained if donors take responsibility for the costs involved and the salaries of the contracted staff.

Cost-effectiveness of WFP food aid and conclusions

50. Food aid can be assessed by calculating the alpha value which serves to measure the ratio between the value of the ration for the beneficiary (i.e., how much it would cost to buy on the local market) and the costs borne by WFP in providing the ration (food cost, maritime transport/superintendence and handling costs, road transport



- costs, including warehousing and handling at the distribution points). When this ratio exceeds one, food aid is considered to be an effective way of transferring resources. The October 1995 study, referring to local market prices and four imported commodities (wheat, rice, sugar and vegetable oil) unloaded at Nouakchott and transported to the six extended delivery points in the interior of the country, produced very satisfactory alpha values, even for wheat (ranging from 1.1 to 1.6), for which world prices have considerably increased. The alpha values fluctuate between 1.4 and 1.6 for sugar, 1.1 and 1.4 for rice and 1.2 and 1.7 for vegetable oil. In Mauritania, food aid is therefore an efficient way of transferring resources to the destitute.
51. WFP assistance over the last five years was intended to help the Government in its efforts to: a) improve food security; b) get through crisis situations due to drought or the influx of refugees from neighbouring countries; c) undertake activities for the alleviation of poverty; d) increase national output; e) improve the school enrolment rate, particularly as regards girls; and f) involve the people in decisions regarding local development. The small-scale works and micro-projects of public interest which are supported by food aid have allowed state services to get closer to the people, and have become models for local development.
52. Paradoxically, this grass-roots approach, which is where the strength of WFP aid lies, greatly depends on the effectiveness of the national authorities (CSA, technical departments of the ministries) as regards respecting the criteria for the selection of beneficiaries and the systems for management, technical monitoring and evaluation. Giving responsibility to local bodies (community groups, farming organizations, NGOs, etc.) would be a step in the right direction to achieve the decentralization desired by the Mauritanian authorities and would allow WFP-assisted activities to achieve better results.

FUTURE ORIENTATION OF WFP ASSISTANCE

Interface between emergency and development aid

53. Emergency aid for drought victims and humanitarian aid for refugees account for about 60 percent of WFP commitments in Mauritania since 1964. However, since rainfall has improved, as in 1993 and 1994, assistance for development activities has replaced emergency aid. At the moment, given the extent of poverty and food insecurity, WFP assistance to development activities should constitute the main line of intervention (even if the possibility of further new droughts cannot be ruled out).
54. Mauritania has undergone great socio-economic changes over the last quarter of a century and this has partially affected the nature of the problem. A population that was mainly rural and whose subsistence relied on rainfall has been replaced by an urban population which principally depends on the import of food commodities. New factors must be taken into consideration: the extent of urban unemployment and the low income levels of people settled in the outlying districts of the two large towns.
55. WFP is unable to assist without distinction the entire population living below the poverty line. Given that, generally speaking, the other donors and organizations direct their assistance towards the urban poor, WFP's strategy will be oriented towards



people suffering from food insecurity with very limited access to food because of low incomes and the non-availability of food on the local markets in the isolated, remote areas.

56. WFP assistance will therefore be concentrated in rural areas, in particular the most isolated and remote areas, suffering from supply difficulties and where the school enrolment rate is lowest. Thus, this new orientation, implemented with efficient technical training and sufficient funds, will consolidate the role of the FFW activities in trying to strengthen the efforts of the people themselves to improve their production structures and living conditions and to be able to meet in a better way possible crisis situations.
57. Many requests for assistance for local development projects come from communities, socio-professional associations and local groups. WFP development assistance, through the FFW activities, could therefore be increased and the extra funding needed could be sought from some donors, especially as regards the non-food inputs which are vital to the construction of engineering and infrastructure works. In any case, experience has shown that this potential is limited by technical and institutional constraints and by problems linked to food aid management.
58. However, WFP is still ready to help refugees and any victims of large-scale droughts by: a) directing its activities towards the target populations in rural areas; b) increasing food deliveries under ongoing development projects (such as school canteens or micro-projects) to mitigate emergencies and by collaborating more closely with the NGOs concerned.

Target groups

59. In rural areas, in agreement with the Government, WFP will target its assistance to rural communities who basically depend on rainfed agriculture, self-employed small farmers (including small livestock breeders) who have no access to irrigated lands, people settled in the outlying districts of secondary rural centres (giving priority to female heads of household, women's associations - and to children aged between six and 12 suffering from malnutrition).

Areas of intervention

60. The development activities, micro-projects and small-scale works starting at the grass-roots level, implemented with strong local participation and eligible for assistance from WFP, in collaboration with other development partners, could concern: a) the management of natural resources (land potential, fish, water, forest and pastoral resources); b) hydro-agricultural improvements (dams, dikes, water reservoirs, etc.); c) protection against sand encroachment (dune-fixing, plantations), the creation of social/health infrastructure (schools, community clinics, village pharmacies, provision of potable water, etc.), road infrastructure (rural service tracks), economic infrastructure (warehouses for cereal reserves and/or supplies of other inputs); d) farming or animal husbandry; e) the creation or rehabilitation of urban services or infrastructure of interest to the community (drainage, collection and processing of household waste, markets, bus stations, slaughterhouses, provision of



water, etc.), especially in rural centres and small secondary towns located in the areas selected for assistance.

61. The second priority area will remain education. WFP will support the national policy to increase the school enrolment rate, in particular encouraging school attendance among girls. It will therefore be necessary to clearly define those rural areas with the highest illiteracy rate, the highest population density and where the level of school enrolment is still low. Close cooperation with the other donors in this sector is of paramount importance to optimize WFP food aid. In fact, current school capacity will put a brake on any further development unless more classrooms are constructed and more teachers trained.

Outlook for joint planning with other organizations

62. In Mauritania, the Ministry of Planning is responsible for coordinating development activities. The various WFP interventions complement the projects and programmes of other donors.

It is vital to maintain effective collaboration with the following organizations:

- a) *agencies of the United Nations*: UNDP for the provision of UNVs; the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the context of assistance to the Malian refugees; FAO as regards rural development projects; and UNICEF for water engineering and nutrition programmes;
 - b) *non-governmental organizations (NGOs)*: the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) for environmental protection activities around the refugee camps; and the Mauritanian Red Crescent as regards nutrition and health;
 - c) *bilateral and multilateral aid*: the World Bank in the sectors of education, management of natural resources and support to women's activities; the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) as regards programmes to safeguard the environment and combat desertification.
63. In view of its future orientations, active collaboration could be sought with the donors and NGOs involved in local development and in encouraging local bodies to take responsibility for local decision-making (as in the UNCDF programme supporting secondary towns or in regional and local development projects supported by bilateral aid). This collaboration must produce the best possible combination of food aid - whose incentive value and economic justification in isolated, remote rural zones has already been proved - and the extra funding needed to buy the non-food inputs which are vital for the success of the engineering and infrastructure works.



Future modalities of WFP assistance

64. Nouakchott is the only port suitable for unloading but it is a long way from WFP target areas and so it is necessary to maintain the principle of extended delivery points. To minimize the cost of its operations, WFP will try, whenever possible, to make subregional purchases and triangular transactions, in accordance with the food charter and the recommendations of the Mindelo talks in which Mauritania took part.
65. As regards the institutional aspects, and in particular in its collaboration with the CSA, WFP will both support the introduction of a working monitoring and evaluation system and will guide the decentralization efforts undertaken by the CSA to ensure the involvement of the beneficiaries at the various stages of defining and approving their projects.

Operational questions

66. Two review missions have been planned for 1996, one for the school canteens and the other for the multi-purpose project (FFW). They are to consider the various concerns outlined above. The definition of the WFP assistance programme for the period 1998-2002 will be the subject, in 1996, of a specific pre-feasibility study which will bring together the various elements of this strategy.

Resource requirements

67. The resources to be allocated to Mauritania will depend on WFP's availability of funds. The value of WFP assistance, for the next five years, should border on four million dollars a year. In fact, among the least developed countries (LDCs), Mauritania is one of those most affected by drought and has a serious structural food deficit.

KEY ISSUES AND RISKS

68. Looking back over the last 30 years, the most likely risk for Mauritania is to have to face another series of dry years which would once again destabilize the food and nutrition situation, provoke further movements of people, undermine the economic stability of families, communes and regions, and would increase the impoverishment of a population that is already extremely vulnerable. This risk would also lead to the partial abandonment of the maintenance of productive infrastructure and of community investments and assets.
69. The development of a partially controlled water-supply sector is the only choice to ensure minimum cereal production levels, especially in periods of drought. However, in the absence of a modern, working legal system, the traditional rights of ownership favour the landowners in the sharing out of the added value produced by these investments.



ANNEX

FOOD AID DELIVERED SINCE 1990				
Year	Programme aid	Project aid	Emergency aid¹	Total
	<i>(tons)</i>			
1990	22 663	5 923	15 893	44 479
1991	54 049	1 443	24 879	80 371
1992	18 505	5 394	4 000	27 899
1993	9 344	18 385	44 453	72 182
1994	7 850	20 055	3 523	31 428
1995	4 456	23 280	9	27 745
Subtotal	116 867	74 480	92 757	284 104

Source: CSA

¹ Food aid to Malian refugees, which stands at 31,159 tons, has not been included in the above figures.

