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Programme  
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de Alimentos

Executive Board  
Second Regular Session

Rome, 24 - 26 March 1997

## EVALUATION REPORTS

### Agenda item 5



Distribution: GENERAL  
**WFP/EB.2/97/5/Add.3**  
19 February 1997  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

## Thematic evaluation<sup>1</sup> of project Brazil 2732 (Exp.1) - Feeding of pre-school and primary schoolchildren in depressed areas

	Original	Expansion 1
Total food cost	38 722 179 dollars	16 971 613 dollars
Total cost to WFP	44 849 237 dollars	19 269 762 dollars
Date of project approval	November 1984	December 1990
Date plan of operations signed	December 1984	July 1991
Date of first distribution	May 1985	February 1992
Duration of project	Five years	Four years
Official termination date	December 1990	February 1996
Date of evaluation	May 1988	January/April 1996
Composition of mission	WFP/FAO/ UNESCO/WHO	WFP/ Government of Brazil <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The thematic evaluation was coordinated by an Evaluation Officer, WFP. The full report is available upon request, in Portuguese only.

<sup>2</sup> The mission was undertaken in conjunction with the Government of Brazil and assisted by a local team leader (Consultant), WFP, three Senior Government officials from the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Student Assistance Foundation (FAE), the National Food Supply Company (CONAB) and a representative from a local NGO, Association for Projects Against Hunger (AGORA).

### ABSTRACT

WFP has been providing assistance to the National School Feeding Programme (NSFP), which, with its 32.5 million beneficiaries, is the largest organized school feeding operation in the world. WFP assistance was well targeted and the project's overall operational performance was satisfactory. The thematic evaluation focused on the NSFP's decentralization experience and on the process of WFP's phasing out. The evaluation identified the following as critical factors for effective WFP assistance to school feeding programmes: a) demonstrated government commitment to a policy that firmly links school feeding with education; b) a decentralized approach to education and school feeding, with an emphasis on local participation in all aspects of school feeding; and c) a responsible and transparent phasing-out strategy for external support as part of the design, monitoring and evaluation of all ongoing and future school feeding projects supported by WFP.

The evaluation recommends a corresponding review of all existing school feeding projects, and the elaboration of guidelines and procedures for dealing more constructively with phasing-out issues.

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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.

The WFP focal points for this document are:

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## INTRODUCTION

1. The declining availability of development resources in general, and of food aid resources in particular, raises a number of questions regarding the future focus of food aid for the development of human resources and the corresponding manner of utilizing food aid.
2. The Office of Evaluation, in accordance with WFP's Strategic and Financial Plan, has initiated a series of thematic evaluations on specific issues in order to: a) improve WFP's understanding on lessons learned and implications for future WFP-supported interventions; b) contribute to the evolution of appropriate policies; and c) contribute to the preparation of concrete operational procedures on those strategic decisions.
3. WFP school feeding projects (SFPs) such as Brazil 2732 are being subjected to mounting criticism that they are open-ended, create dependence on foreign aid, sometimes result in undesirable changes in food habits, do not encourage local agricultural production and greater self-reliance, and overall are not sustainable once foreign food aid is withdrawn. The subject of long-standing food-aided projects, and the related issues of scaling down or phasing out such operational projects, has caused legitimate concern for WFP, and it has been recognized that school feeding interventions are open-ended by nature, but that external support must be structured in a more finite context.
4. On several occasions, when national school feeding activities have been supported through a long-standing food-aided operation, WFP has seen the need to end its assistance to this type of intervention. However, phase-outs have turned out to be very difficult when recipient governments, because of their economic adjustments, experience problems in assuming full responsibility for additional budgetary allocations to their social programmes. On the other hand, it is recognized that, although more phase-outs are necessary, there are not yet in place clear mechanisms, sufficiently concrete procedures and time-frames for the phasing-out process with the actual take-over of project activities by recipient governments or local communities. It has also become evident that WFP phase-out strategies are not clearly formulated in most project designs.

### Purpose and scope of the thematic evaluation

5. Brazil was selected as an appropriate case in which to undertake a thematic evaluation, since it has a large school feeding programme and has received considerable external support. The evaluation proceeded by assessing key aspects of Brazil's National School Feeding Programme (NSFP) and relating these findings to the WFP-assisted project Brazil 2732 (Exp.1) - "Feeding of pre-school and primary schoolchildren in depressed areas", from which WFP withdrew in 1995. The major focus of this evaluation was on: a) Brazil's attempts to decentralize the NSFP; b) WFP's contribution to this strategy; and c) the implications of decentralization for a successful phasing-out strategy.
6. The thematic evaluation mission was undertaken by WFP in conjunction with the Government of Brazil and was developed in parallel with a desk review, a questionnaire survey and field visits to selected municipalities. The evaluation was to identify areas in which WFP's approach to the timing of support to school feeding could be improved.



## MAJOR FINDINGS

### The National School Feeding Programme and the decentralization process

7. It is recognized that Brazil has made remarkable efforts to increase access to basic education and contribute to a reduction in the prevalence of nutritional deficiencies among pre-primary and primary school populations in depressed areas. In order to achieve these goals, several school feeding schemes were initiated in the early thirties, and these were gradually transferred into a National School Feeding Programme, locally known as the school lunch (“merenda escolar”) programme.
8. The National School Feeding Programme is executed by the Foundation for Assistance to Students (FAE), under the supervision of the Ministry of Education; it currently assists 32.5 million beneficiaries. The NSFP represents the largest targeted social programme in the country. It has been the only programme in the context of Brazilian food and nutrition policies that has been maintained, expanded and modernized over the decades. The NSFP has particularly played an important role in providing critical social support and services to the most disadvantaged rural communities through its assistance to primary schoolchildren. It was noted that the Government had already made important strides in the education sector and high rates of school enrolment and attendance had been achieved; the Government of Brazil is to be commended on the overall progress made to date.
9. The NSFP also represents today a significant socio-economic support programme in Brazil. On average most families have two or three children of school age, and the annual per capita value of just the food component of the NSFP is close to 24 dollars.<sup>1</sup> Hence, it represents an annual family income supplement of 48 to 72 dollars, which is around 10 percent of the annual income of families living below the absolute poverty line. This direct benefit to NSFP beneficiaries and their families is significant in terms of incomes and food security at the household level.
10. The NSFP was originally carried out as a vertical programme and implemented as a direct feeding intervention largely in isolation from other interventions, as if feeding were an end in itself rather than a means. It was not adequately linked to development programmes and resources of other relevant ministries, and was not sufficiently coordinated with relevant projects and programmes of other development agencies and donors operating in Brazil, such as UNICEF, WHO and NGOs.
11. The decentralization of the school lunch programme started to gain momentum in the mid-eighties. In 1988, under the new constitution, it was established that responsibility for social services, particularly education, should be transferred to local municipalities and provisions were made for a significant increase in municipal budgets for purchases of food in the local and regional markets.
12. The global decentralization of the NSFP brought with it an enormous potential to achieve integrated socio-economic development, in particular in the small municipalities of greatest need, especially those in the North, Northeast and West Central Regions of Brazil. The transfer of federal funds for school feeding to local authorities usually represented five to 10 percent of the total budgets of the small municipalities. When the municipalities succeeded in buying all of the required staples locally, the local economy was significantly

<sup>1</sup> All monetary values are expressed in United States dollars, unless otherwise stated. At the time of the evaluation, one United States dollar equalled 0.963 reais.



strengthened. This was another direct effect of decentralization on the food security, incomes and living conditions of local communities, guaranteeing an outlet for local food production and consolidating the economy of local farmers and food traders.

13. The study concluded that the decentralization process was cost-effective, since it lowered the cost of food rations per child and per day, while enhancing the quality and quantity of the daily menus of the school lunch. With the same budget earmarked for school feeding, better perishable and non-perishable foodstuffs could be acquired in greater quantities, and the purchasing could be better adapted to local eating habits and food practices. In addition, this process has allowed the school feeding food basket to be maintained, even in periods when budget allocations to the municipalities were delayed.
14. Considering the magnitude and complexity of the decentralization process of the NSFP, its overall management has been deemed adequate. However, hesitant community participation in the management of the school feeding scheme has been a major constraint in the implementation of the NSFP. The programme has come to be considered by the community as an acquired right, with the main functions of a social service provided by the Government. Under these conditions it is doubtful whether the NSFP will be sustainable once government inputs are withdrawn. The evaluation criticizes that the NSFP did not do enough to bring the assisted communities into a decision-making process to promote self-reliant activities.
15. In spite of the overall success, it appears that other factors are also slowing down the decentralization process. These are:
  - a) lack of political will on the part of some local authorities at the state and municipal levels, which hinders the implementation of the programme;
  - b) lack of skilled local staff for the procurement and purchase of food at the municipal level;
  - c) limited capacity of local food producers and traders to participate in the procurement procedures;
  - d) inadequate food storage capacity in schools especially for perishables;
  - e) insufficient integration of the NSFP with community initiatives at the school level, such as school gardens, parent and teacher's associations, etc.; and
  - f) insufficient coordination between school feeding and other public sector interventions in the fields of agriculture, health and nutrition.
16. The evaluation mission was of the opinion that - in spite of these shortcomings - the decentralization process has shown its potential in: a) integrating the municipalities with other local development institutions and community organizations to undertake self-targeting activities, particularly in areas of greatest need; b) increasing parents' and teachers' participation in all stages of implementation; c) stimulating local production and trade through the purchase of food produced and/or traded locally; and d) reducing costs by enhancing efficiency. The decentralization of the NSFP has indeed been a significant tool in promoting sustainable social development in areas of undernutrition and poverty.



## The WFP-assisted project

17. WFP has been supporting Brazil's school feeding programmes since 1965. The focus of assistance was in the northern and north-eastern states of Brazil. The total value of WFP's contribution to the Government's school feeding programmes has been approximately 110 million dollars, through different projects, namely: Brazil 012 and Expansion - "Primary school feeding in Bom Jesus Da Lapa district"; Brazil 339 and Expansion - "School feeding in Sao Francisco valley"; Brazil 541 - "Feeding of secondary schools in Bahía state"; Brazil 2325 - "Nutrition education and supplementary feeding of pre-school and schoolchildren"; and Brazil 2732 and Expansion.
18. The second phase of project Brazil 2732 (Exp.1) started in 1992 (WFP's contributions represented only four percent of the annual budget of the NSFP). The plan of operations stated that the objectives to be achieved during the life of the project were to: a) accelerate the Government's efforts to increase access to basic education in the depressed areas of the Northeast region; b) improve the quality and quantity of school meals provided to primary schoolchildren through selected WFP commodities; c) increase school enrolment and attendance rates, to an average attendance of 80 percent; and d) reduce drop-out rates by approximately 10 percent by the end of the project. It should be noted that decentralization or phase-out issues were not explicitly addressed in the objectives.
19. About 576,000 children at 9,992 state and municipal primary schools located in 103 municipalities of the states of Ceará, Paraíba and Piauí in the Northeast region were to receive meals prepared from WFP-supplied commodities (pulses, dried skim milk, canned fish/meat).

## Assessment of project performance

### Targeting

20. The evaluation confirmed that the focused geographical targeting applied by WFP covered the very poor areas in the Northeast. The Map of Hunger, prepared by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) in 1993, reported that the areas assisted by the project are below the line of absolute poverty: Piauí ranked worst among the Brazilian states, with 57.54 percent of its population in absolute poverty, Ceará second with 47.23 percent and Paraíba third with 47.21 percent.
21. In 1992, WFP carried out a targeting survey in 10 municipalities and 31 schools of the above-mentioned states. A census of primary schoolchildren was undertaken to define the most affected municipalities in terms of undernutrition. A "height for age" indicator applied to schoolchildren around seven years of age proved to be a valid measure of their quality of life since birth. The indicator also served as a useful reference for effectively targeting the food-deficit and poverty-affected areas.

### Progress towards objectives

22. When the original phase of the project was redesigned, it was given the short-term objective of providing an additional WFP food input in order to contribute to the improvement of the food basket and ration scale of the school lunch (in terms of ration per child per day and per school year) in the selected WFP-assisted schools.
23. This objective was achieved to a considerable extent since the ration provided by WFP was always above the food basket established by FAE. The WFP monitoring system showed that the size of the WFP ration was increased, particularly during the periods



of government budget constraints (1992-93), when the Government's ration to WFP-assisted schools was reduced by half.

24. The WFP-supplied food basket was expected to increase the calorie content of the ration from 350 kilocalories (17.5 percent of daily needs) to 400 kilocalories (20 percent), and the protein content from nine grams (22.5 percent) to 14 grams a day (35 percent). The mission confirmed that the government commitment to provide 40 percent of the basic food input was not fulfilled because of the tight budgetary situation of FAE during the implementation of the WFP-assisted project; hence, the project's contribution towards schoolchildren's dietary nutritional requirements during the period they spend in school was not achieved.
25. In spite of this shortcoming, WFP assistance can be considered to have contributed to improving children's scholastic performance. According to the WFP survey, the drop-out rates declined from 28.8 percent in 1992 to 17.6 percent in 1995. The attendance rate grew from 71 percent in 1992 to 91.9 percent in 1995, fully achieving the objective of increasing the attendance rate to 90 percent.

### **Role of food aid**

26. The mission confirmed that WFP food aid played an important role in increasing primary school enrolment and maintaining the current high rates of attendance at rural primary schools by serving as an effective incentive to children and their parents. Interviews and questionnaire surveys also showed that parents were fully aware of the value of education and that, despite financial difficulties, they would continue to send their children to school. Despite the lack of detailed data regarding gender differentials in education, similar considerations apply to gender equity of project participants in the educational process either as students or teachers, but this cannot necessarily be considered a direct result of providing food assistance. WFP support also gave the Brazilian Government an increased capacity to give attention to school feeding needs in the Northeast, taking into consideration that the municipalities had enlarged their school network in pursuance of the policy of decentralizing education.
27. In sum, the project's overall operational performance was found to be satisfactory. The number of beneficiaries covered by the project during the three school years 1992/93 - 1994/95 was in accordance with the targets set. More specifically, the mission found that project activities were implemented on schedule, and that the monitoring system allowed for the accounting of resources, the tracking of physical progress and the measurement of outcomes against stated targets. With the previously noted exception of increased government food contributions, the mission considered government obligations to have been met.

### **Project contribution to NSFP decentralization and WFP phasing out**

28. During the first two years of the project's implementation, the NSFP was still administered centrally. Following the government policy against hunger and poverty of the National Food Security Council, the centralized distribution of food ceased and was replaced by a transfer of financial resources (0.13 dollar per student) which were vested in the respective states, municipalities and philanthropic schools for the purchase of their own food supplies.
29. The above policy implied radical changes in the project's implementation procedures, since WFP could not be involved in the direct supply of food to individual municipalities and schools in the Northeast region or in the direct allocation of cash for local purchases. In view of the fact that Brazil had large public stocks of food supplies, the Government



acknowledged that the country no longer required and could not justify further external food aid. With the cessation of centralized food distribution, WFP food assistance became less relevant.

30. The Government of Brazil therefore requested WFP to utilize a part of the uncommitted monetized resources to assist the decentralization process of the NFSP, through the transfer of know-how to support capacity-building of municipal institutions. In this context, it was recognized that local authorities lacked the capacity to take on decentralized management functions: budget management, the planning of food requirements, food logistics, quality control, accounting, and reporting and monitoring systems. Hence, the plan of operations was reformulated in 1995 and the WFP phasing-out activities in the three states assisted by WFP included the following: a) provision of computer equipment for facilitating monitoring, in the three states, accompanied by relevant training; b) planning and implementation of in-service training programmes on food management and logistics, at the state and municipal levels, and preparation of ready-to-use training material; and c) financial and organizational support to a regional symposium on school feeding programmes in Latin America, in order to compare experiences among participants from 10 countries and to introduce a decentralization strategy for such programmes based on the Brazilian experience.
31. A continuing programme of technical assistance was envisaged to assist in transferring WFP expertise on the use of food aid for development, but WFP resource constraints meant that no further support could be made available to Brazil. Resource constraints also led to the decision to close down the WFP country office in Brasilia (May 1996) without any further phasing-out support for institutional development. Unfortunately, the initial agreement of the Government of Brazil to use its own food resources to support development programmes in depressed areas and to establish the necessary institutional infrastructure to implement these programmes did not materialize, either. Legal constraints have prevented so far the setting up of these “National Food for Development Programmes”, a crucial part of the overall WFP phasing-out strategy.
32. The mission believes that the time period allocated by WFP for its phasing out was too short. Phasing out should have started much earlier or lasted longer, at least as long as the originally planned two-year phasing-out period, which would have improved the institutional capacity for its implementation. However, the mission confirmed that WFP’s activities during 1995 in assisting the decentralization of the NSFP had a positive effect on the development of institutional capacity in the rural municipalities assisted by project Brazil 2732. Training packages for trainers were designed and tested using a participatory approach from the grass-roots up in order to create a multiplier effect. This proved to be a useful starting point for FAE, although their own limited resources may not permit a very intensive follow-up, and extended technical assistance from WFP would have accelerated implementation significantly.

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## ISSUES AND LESSONS LEARNED

33. School feeding projects (SFPs) are usually planned as social welfare activities, rather than being envisioned and designed to achieve broader education and human resource development programmes. This approach has contributed to the difficulties encountered in planning the phase-out of WFP assistance. Furthermore, phasing-out strategies in SFPs are far more likely to succeed when governments, NGOs and communities are active partners



in the design and implementation of SFPs. This participation is a key ingredient in creating local ownership and sustainability beyond external assistance. In Brazil, like elsewhere, this has too often been neglected during project preparation and formulation.

34. At past sessions of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA) and, more recently, of the Executive Board, the subject of long-standing food-aided operations and the related issue of phase-out and take-over strategies, has been a recurrent topic of debate. Recommendations to phase out this type of intervention have caused deep concern; mechanisms to implement such strategies are not yet in place.
35. The findings of this study point to the need and the potential for a more structured approach to addressing the phasing out of assistance from school feeding projects. Phasing-out issues need to be explicitly addressed during appraisal exercises, at the project design and formulation stages, and in evaluations. A further study might be required to identify those education sector approaches and specific objectives and inputs which have the potential to enhance phasing-out objectives and avoid long-term dependency. In tackling these tasks, however, it is necessary to proceed in such a way that the government programmes being assisted will not collapse because of the scaling down and phasing out of WFP assistance.
36. The experience of Brazil may provide ideas on how to adapt to such strategies. Although one needs to caution against a simple transfer of approaches from one institutional environment to another, it is useful to extract the following as most likely key ingredients for successful external participation in school feeding programmes: a) a tradition of and a strong government commitment to allocating and protecting public funds for the school feeding programme; b) a policy of decentralization that leads to increased effectiveness and sustainability; c) an adequate institutional framework and sufficient human resources to implement the NSFP at the central, regional and local levels; and d) an appropriate infrastructure for local purchasing of food supplies and, even more important, adequate food buffer stocks.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES

### Decentralization

37. WFP had only a limited impact on the evolution of policy and institutional conditions at the national level. However, in smaller and poorer countries it will be up to WFP to concern itself more with the establishment of an appropriate institutional environment, while or even before food aid resources are allocated to school feeding programmes. Various forms of decentralization should be experimented with and assessed with respect to their effectiveness in reaching those most in need and making recipient institutions more responsible for the continuation and sustainability of these programmes.

### Phasing out

38. Sustainability and phasing-out concerns need to be explicitly introduced into all existing school feeding programmes. In designing new school feeding schemes or expansions to existing ones, WFP should formulate an integrated strategy on how and when WFP aid should phase out and recipient governments or local communities effect a full take-over of WFP assistance. This should be guided by the following principles:



- a) Recipient governments must be helped in becoming more specific on their policies and responsibilities towards school feeding.
- b) In order to assure the eventual phasing out of WFP assistance, WFP should help to define, design and develop schemes that rely more on local institutions, NGOs and other development partners.
- c) WFP should encourage the formulation of more explicit phasing-out objectives and appropriate indicators for phasing out should be identified at the very earliest stage of project formulation.
- d) School feeding programmes (SFPs) to be assisted by WFP must clearly indicate the financial and organizational responsibilities of all implementing and participating agencies including other donors, the government concerned, NGOs and communities. Furthermore, the period of time required by recipient countries to assure a definite and reliable take-over must be mutually agreed between WFP and the governments concerned.
- e) Where possible, WFP's food for SFPs should be viewed as a contribution to already existing food inputs or equivalent financial resources coming from various levels - local, state or national.
- f) WFP should consider launching pilot projects in cooperation with recipient governments, NGOs and other partners to develop diversified and replicable models on approaches for mobilizing community participation in self-help school feeding management.
- g) WFP should more forcefully foster the concept of "participation in school feeding", which should be institutionalized as part of SFPs. This approach should include the organization of parent and community groups, group participation in decision-making, implementation and promotion of SCPs, and awareness of their importance.
- h) WFP should link its assistance to applied nutrition programmes to ensure the continued availability of school meals through local food staples.

### **Reviewing existing school feeding projects**

39. In order for the above follow-up actions to be effective, it is essential that WFP, within its decentralization and organizational change, review its existing long-standing and open-ended school feeding projects, particularly while formulating Country Programmes. This study should also receive priority in terms of resources for adequate training and workshops to motivate relevant WFP staff on how to design and develop these approaches.

