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INFORMATION NOTES

WFP YEAR 2000 (Y2K) PREPARATIONS

BACKGROUND

1.   The need for Y2K business continuity planning was recognized at an early stage by the Programme, in terms of both information technology systems and normal business operations. The focus has been to ensure two objectives:

   a)   security and continuity of the food delivery pipeline to beneficiaries;

   b)   security of staff and material assets.

2.   The four-phase approach suggested by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in its July 1998 session has been adopted:

   • Year 2000 <u>Awareness</u>—a programme of information to raise awareness of the Y2K issue throughout the organization. This began in late 1998 and has continued with briefing papers and presentations to headquarters and field staff.

   • Year 2000 <u>Inventory Assessment</u> of vulnerability to Y2K. An Inventory Assessment questionnaire was distributed to all country offices (COs) in February 1999. Ninety percent of COs have responded.

   • Year 2000 <u>Action Plan</u>s were requested from COs in April 1999. They are geared towards identifying key business processes and actions that can be taken prior to the critical event period to mitigate the impact on key business processes. Eighty percent of COs have responded.

   • Year 2000 <u>Contingency Plans</u>. The main thrust of this phase is to sensitize COs to the impact of unpredictable environmental factors on their ability to continue normal operations from 1 January 2000 onwards. Guidelines were issued in July 1999. Sixty percent of COs have responded so far.

3.   Outstanding responses are being followed up. All responses are being analysed to identify issues of corporate concern, and to provide advice and guidance using experience gained elsewhere.

Strategic Focus

4.   Established Programme structures and lines of responsibility are being used in the preparation and implementation of the Y2K project. Emphasis has been placed on devolved responsibility, by inviting the active involvement of the Country, Regional and Divisional Directors in the process. They are backed by a Y2K task force comprising country office and divisional focal points, regional coordinators, and a central Y2K team comprising two full-time corporate Y2K coordinators, one part-time project assistant and the Y2K Project manager.

Field Preparations

5.   The preparations on Action and Contingency plans in the field are generally progressing well, albeit to varying degrees. Some countries seem to be less concerned about the effects of Y2K. COs handling complex emergencies usually have more up-to-date computer equipment. Others are dealing continuously with crises and daily operational problems and rely on their proven ability of coping with frequent shortages. Offices in countries considered particularly 'at risk' are receiving special attention from headquarters.

6.   Seventy-five percent of WFP country offices share premises and facilities with other United Nations agencies. Common United Nations steps at country level are being developed through the United Nations Resident Coordinator to ensure security of staff and material assets, and to have contingency measures in place in the event of disruptions to key utility services.

Logistical Leadership

7.   In recognition of the specialist experience that WFP has acquired with logistical planning and delivery, the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) has entrusted WFP to take the lead in coordinating Y2K implications in this area with respect to United Nations emergency programmes, in particular with UNICEF and UNHCR. Good progress has already been made at regional and country level. Consultations between the respective headquarters are under way.

Headquarters Preparations

8.   Preparations to ensure compliance of information technology systems (mainframe systems, servers and hardware, communication systems) are well advanced, having been initiated early in 1998. A computer ICC mainframe test on 2/3 October 1999 gave satisfactory results.

9.   Headquarters infrastructure and security preparations, banking and personnel plans are also being developed, in close conjunction with the other two Rome-based United Nations agencies based in Rome (IFAD and FAO), and in consultation with other agencies of the United Nations common system. These relate to a range of issues such as staff communications and awareness programmes, security plans, early salary payments and advice on personal contingency measures.

10.   Headquarters support processes for field operations (purchasing, call forward planning for food and non-food items to build buffer stocks, payments and delivery from donor countries to recipient ports of entry) are also being confirmed.

11.   An emergency team will be in place to ensure that any crisis situations developing at headquarters or in COs are contained and effectively managed. Emergency communication channels (satellite telephone, two-way radio system, telex) will be established.

Project Resourcing

12.   COs and headquarters divisions have been requested to budget for Y2K-generated expenditure, separately for action and contingency plans. To the extent possible, they will cover expenditure from their own resources. In addition, budgetary provisions are being made at corporate level from current PSA resources through already-in-place earmarkings and reprogramming of existing allotments where such opportunities exist. Concerned offices with approved plans will receive a revised 1999 allotment, which will give the spending authority to proceed on Y2K purchases.

13.   The main objects of expenditure at field level are computer hardware and software, satellite telephones, travel to assist sub-offices, generators and shared United Nations in-country expenses. By far the largest expenditure will be incurred by the Africa region (OSA).

ISSUES

14.   The main issues are:

- the need to ensure that communication channels are maintained with field offices in the event that traditional methods (e.g. telephone systems, e-mail, fax) fail to function in the new year. The necessary provisions are being made in conjunction with other United Nations agencies to establish shared radio and satellite phone links.

- the necessity to identify action and contingency items at an early stage, both at headquarters and in the field, to ensure that timely steps are taken to purchase the necessary equipment. Critical items such as generators are expected to be in short supply after 2000.

- sufficient lead time to allow for the call forward of commodities;

- preparations to be completed where they have not been addressed at country level, particularly in parts of OSA and Asia and Eastern Europe (OAE);

- United Nations system country level coordination, particularly on issues related to personal security and safety of premises, where these have not progressed.

15.   Headquarters divisions are well prepared for Y2K. Action plan items are being addressed, and on matters of contingency the necessary preparations are taking place in consultation with FAO and IFAD. Three inter-agency working groups (infrastructure, including telecommunications and security; finance and banking; and personnel) have been established.

16.   The need for contingency budgets in the majority of cases, at both field and headquarters levels, have been mitigated by a planned programme of infrastructure and equipment replacement, using normal budgetary provisions.