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## EVALUATION REPORTS

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## THEMATIC STUDY OF RECURRING CHALLENGES IN THE PROVISION OF FOOD ASSISTANCE IN COMPLEX EMERGENCIES

### ABSTRACT

This report describes the ethical dilemmas as well as operational challenges faced in getting food assistance to those who need it in complex (i.e. conflict) emergencies. It highlights the need to combine operational capabilities—the ability to do things—with careful, continuous analysis and political sensitivity—the ability to determine what best to do, how to do it, what to avoid, how to adapt in rapidly changing circumstances and when to stop.

It summarizes the key findings and recommendations of a more substantial report of the same title which should be referred to for further details, including references. Neither is definitive. While acknowledging the enormous efforts made and initiatives taken by WFP, its partners and individual staff in complex emergencies, both reports identify aspects of policy, procedures and practice to which WFP must give further in-depth consideration and attention.

Principal recommendations relate to:

- clarifying the Programme's policy and basic principles for assistance in complex emergencies, and providing corresponding guidance to staff, including on human rights issues and the circumstances under which it may be necessary to suspend assistance;
- continuing and enhancing WFP's engagement in ongoing inter-agency processes relating to the coordination of international assistance and the interaction between humanitarian, political and human rights concerns, emphasizing adherence to humanitarian principles;
- reviewing experience in depth and developing, with partners and in consultation with donors, methodologies, check-lists and guidelines (as appropriate) for assessment, targeting and assistance strategies in conflict situations, including assistance through market interventions;
- consolidating and refining arrangements for the mobilization and management of resources on a regional basis where necessary to respond to changing needs between neighbouring countries;
- continuing and continuously refining security measures and training in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD), other operational United Nations agencies and NGO partners, with attention to increasing acceptance of as well as protecting the Programme's humanitarian operations;
- providing adequate detailed, country-specific briefings to staff being assigned in conflict situations, and giving attention to interpersonal and negotiating skills in the selection and training of all staff in such situations.

## NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

**This document is submitted for consideration to the Executive Board.**

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document, to contact the WFP staff focal points indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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Should you have any questions regarding matters of dispatch of documentation for the Executive Board, please contact the Documentation and Meetings Clerk (tel.: 066513-2641).



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## ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

CAP	Consolidated Appeal Process
ECHA	Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
IASC-WG	Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
LTSH	Land Transportation, Storage and Handling
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
SAT	(WFP) Security Awareness Training
SRSG	Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UNSECOORD	Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator
UNV	United Nations Volunteer



## I. CONTEXT

### Introduction

1. A ‘complex emergency’ is: *“a humanitarian crisis in a country, region or society where there is a total or considerable breakdown of authority resulting from internal or external conflict and which requires an international response that goes beyond the mandate or capacity of any single agency and/or ongoing United Nations country programme.”*  
[Definition agreed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Working Group (IASC-WG) in 1998.]
2. WFP has delivered large quantities of emergency food aid into situations involving armed conflict. Despite enormous problems, many affected civilian populations have received food and related assistance. But others have not been reached or have received only minimal quantities, delivery costs have been high, some food has been lost, stolen or misused, and increasing numbers of WFP and other humanitarian workers have been killed or injured. At the same time, humanitarian assistance operations have come under increasingly critical scrutiny and there has been much soul-searching by agencies and individuals who have attempted to analyse the impacts of their efforts.
3. This summary report highlights recurring problems and dilemmas in providing food assistance in these situations. It is based largely on the experiences and perceptions of practitioners in WFP and other organizations. It also draws on existing reports and literature. It is not exhaustive but makes recommendations for follow-up action. Recommendations relating to the later stages of operations are consistent with action proposed in the WFP policy paper “From Crisis to Recovery”(WFP/EB.A/98/4-A).

### Role of Food and the Impact of Food Aid

4. Food is a basic survival need for people, an essential, strategic resource for a fighting force, and an economic good which can be traded, and hoarded. The control of food supplies is a source of power and influence. Although WFP and most humanitarian agencies attempt to be “neutral” in conflict situations, and to provide assistance “impartially” (on the basis of need), the assistance provided—especially bulk food assistance—is not without consequences for the course of events and the actions of the parties to the conflict.
5. Warring parties have sought to deny food to “enemies” through siege tactics (Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia,), by burning crops and looting food stocks (Somalia, northern Uganda), mining fields (Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique), and obstructing deliveries of aid, often in spite of agreements not to. Obstruction has taken the form of deliberate attacks on and looting of convoys (Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia) or the creation of “administrative” obstacles (flight bans in Sudan and embargoes on internal movements within Liberia).
6. While the delivery and distribution of food lend legitimacy to and reinforce the authority of the government or faction which is able to effectively control distributions at the local level, the operations also generate considerable economic activity. They can be a source of revenue for the parties to the conflict either directly, through contracting and misappropriation, or indirectly through “taxation”.



7. In almost all situations, groups have attempted to manipulate allocation and distribution processes to favour “their” areas or populations. Distributions, or the prospect of food distributions, have been used to draw people to specific locations where they can be protected, contained or attacked. The denial of food has been used to force people to leave their homes. The giving and withholding of food assistance was used by local political factions to try to influence voting in elections (in Bosnia).
8. Assistance operations sometimes have a direct effect on the conflict. In Angola, Bosnia and southern Sudan, the airlifting of food to besieged towns and cities effectively prevented the besiegers from accomplishing their tactical objectives, and led to United Nations/UNHCR/WFP aircraft being shot at in Angola and Bosnia.
9. Food aid has also been used, or proposed, as a policy tool by members of the international community. Some donors have earmarked contributions to WFP for specific projects in specified localities, excluding others. Special representatives of the United Nations Secretary-General (SRSGs) have sometimes requested WFP to adjust its programmes to facilitate political negotiations. Decisions on ration levels for refugees may occasionally have been influenced by a desire to encourage the repatriation of refugees.
10. In a number of cases (Bosnia, Ethiopia, Nigeria/Biafra, southern Sudan), the providers of food aid have been accused of sustaining and prolonging the conflict. Less dramatically, there are questions concerning possible disincentive effects. It is widely believed that the arrival and distribution of large quantities of food aid in Somalia in late 1994 undermined a fragile, embryonic recovery. Poorly timed and unpredictable food aid is said to have been a disincentive to local traders and created market instability in Eritrea and Rwanda.

## II. RELATIONSHIPS

### Access and Relations with Warring Parties

11. Problems associated with access were described by the United Nations Secretary-General in a recent report to the Security Council: “Humanitarian access has been hampered by general insecurity arising from the conflict, an inability or unwillingness on the part of State or non-State actors to allow such access and in some cases by deliberate attempts to obstruct humanitarian assistance. Frequent interruptions of assistance to victims in Sudan and Afghanistan reflect the difficulties of maintaining humanitarian access even where the parties have agreed on the need for humanitarian assistance”.
12. In most conflict situations, access to some if not all of the affected civilian populations and/or safe passage for food and other relief supplies to reach them has had to be negotiated with the parties to the conflict. In some cases, access and safe passage have effectively been “purchased” (e.g. Angola 1993, Somalia 1992). Negotiations have often been conducted by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, WFP and NGO implementing partner staff at various levels in country. In some cases there have been high-level international negotiations. Since 1997, the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) and senior officials of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) have taken an active role in advocating and negotiating for access on behalf of the United Nations agencies and NGOs (e.g. Sudan).
13. However, experience has shown that general accords cannot be wholly relied on as local commanders do not always respect agreements signed by higher authorities, commanders change and localities change hands. Therefore, staff assigned in remote locations or



travelling with convoys often have to negotiate with armed individuals manning road blocks and those in *de facto* control of particular localities.

**Recommendation II-1:** *While continuing to work closely with and support the ERC/OCHA and Humanitarian Coordinators in each complex/conflict situation in i) negotiating access to all civilian populations for purposes of assessment and the delivery and monitoring of humanitarian assistance; ii) establishing clearly defined working relationships between international humanitarian agencies and the warring parties, WFP should:*

- a) *undertake a detailed review and analysis of the Programme's own experience in dealing with non-State entities and the outcomes for both food security and staff security; and*
  - b) *ensure, through careful selection and training, that the Programme's own staff in the field have the capacity to negotiate with and persuade local commanders and faction leaders to cooperate with the provision of humanitarian food assistance to those who need it most.*
14. The full report discusses critical factors which affect relationships and negotiations with warring parties, and provides recommendations in relation to disseminating, in each situation, information concerning the specific objectives and modalities of food assistance.

### Overall Planning and Management of International Assistance

15. Where normal government structures and services have broken down and/or become fragmented, international organizations or ad hoc bodies representing the international community have to take responsibility for many policy-making and coordination as well as operational aspects which, in a "normal" emergency, would be the responsibility of the government. For countries affected by complex emergencies, individual agencies and donors have *de facto* defined policies and priorities, at least for areas not under government control, through their own programming decisions. A United Nations Lead Agency has been designated by the Secretary-General in a few cases. Special mechanisms have been set up for Afghanistan and Somalia. The pros and cons of different mechanisms are being discussed in several international fora.
16. Since 1994, the Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) has assured a degree of coordination, at least among United Nations agencies, in the planning of assistance activities. Since 1997/98, greater coherence is being sought through the definition, as part of each CAP, of agreed overall, inter-sectoral strategies. Until now, assessment of food needs by WFP with its main partners and donors has effectively been undertaken separately and the conclusions inserted in the CAP.

**Recommendation II-2:** *WFP should continue to engage fully in and enhance its contribution to the various ongoing discussions at the international level concerning arrangements for policy-making, coordination and resourcing in protracted complex emergency and transitional situations, and for the integration of reconstruction, reintegration and demobilization needs alongside continuing relief needs in consolidated appeals. In each situation, WFP should take initiatives in collaboration with other members of the IASC and NGO partners to define strategies, priorities and criteria for international food and food-related assistance as an integral part of a coherent overall assistance framework.*

17. The full report makes additional recommendations in relation to reviewing the effects of different coordination arrangements on food security assistance and working within the IASC to promote the establishment of suitable, broad-based consultative bodies, where



needed. It also discusses issues relating to “remote control” when, as in Afghanistan and Somalia, operational headquarters have been established and maintained in a neighbouring country.

### Relations with Peace-keeping Forces and Political Initiatives

18. The nature and extent of collaboration with peace-keeping missions have varied with the mandates of those forces and the resources at their disposal. However, local groups have not always recognized the difference between the humanitarian and peace-keeping/cease-fire-observation operations of the United Nations, and groups opposing the latter missions in Somalia and Tajikistan have also targeted the humanitarian operations. On the other hand, the monitoring mission in Angola suffered from being associated with the humanitarian operation which the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) perceived as supporting primarily the Government.
19. In Liberia, the regional Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) force provided support as and when they had time and resources available. However, the force has been widely perceived as not being neutral and in 1993, supported by the SRSG, it banned cross-border relief operations of NGOs coming from Côte d’Ivoire and at times fired on relief convoys in the border areas.
20. At times in Angola, Afghanistan, Liberia and Somalia, an SRSG has requested WFP or the humanitarian agencies in general to adjust programmes planned on the basis of assessed needs in order to facilitate political negotiations. Such requests have generally been politely resisted by WFP but the situation occasionally has been difficult. On the other hand, at a critical moment in Liberia, WFP was able to assist the SRSG to meet with the principal faction leader to discuss a ceasefire.
21. A guidance note agreed by the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA) in April 1999 may help to avoid direct pressure on agencies in the future. It affirms that Humanitarian Coordinators (HCs) are responsible to the ERC under the strategic leadership of the SRSG who has overall authority with regard to United Nations operations and direct responsibility for peace-keeping and political aspects. This is linked to more general progress in the last few years in coordination between the peace-keeping, political and humanitarian arms of the United Nations including arrangements to ensure that humanitarian aspects are considered whenever the Security Council establishes mandates for peace-keeping or other international forces or initiates other action in relation to conflict situations.

***Recommendation II-3:*** *While coordinating (through the ERC and Humanitarian Coordinators) with United Nations political initiatives and cooperating with United Nations peace-keeping forces and benefiting from their protection where necessary, WFP should:*

- a) seek, in each situation, to communicate to local authorities and the population in general the strictly humanitarian role and objectives of the Programme and its partners; and*
- b) continue to work through the IASC and closely with the ERC and OCHA to ensure that the rights of conflict victims to receive humanitarian food assistance are upheld and not subordinated to political considerations.*



### III. PROGRAMME ISSUES

#### Assessment and Monitoring

22. Serious information gaps, doubts about the reliability of many data and difficulties in verifying information are characteristic of complex emergencies. Problems arise from the general state of disruption, the absence of local institutions representing all sections of society and the presence of groups intent on asserting their own interests and control. These difficulties are compounded by the pressure that interpreters and national staff are often subjected to by local interest groups, and assessment missions themselves can be dangerous undertakings.
23. Estimating the numbers of people requiring assistance and keeping up-to-date with changes has been difficult. Information on the access different population groups have to food and various coping strategies has been limited in many cases. Decisions on ration levels, assistance strategies and the phasing down/out of distributions have not always benefited from adequate information.
24. Noting that decisions always have to be made with less-than-adequate information, experienced staff emphasize the importance of carefully monitoring the situation of the population groups most vulnerable to food insecurity and ensuring prompt responses to observed changes in the situation. But monitoring has been difficult and post-distribution monitoring has been limited in most conflict-affected areas being constrained by security risks, obstruction and/or inadequate resources. Monitoring staff have sometimes been threatened and intimidated.

#### Targeting and Distribution

25. Various combinations of general dry-ration distributions, targeted distributions or vulnerable group feeding, supplementary feeding programmes and food for work have been used by WFP in almost all complex emergency situations. Wet feeding—the provision of food to be eaten on the spot—has been organized by the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (ICRC) and NGOs in some particularly critical situations (Liberia, Somalia, eastern Zaire). Sometimes different combinations of these strategies have been used in different parts of the same country at the same time (Burundi). Market interventions have been rare. Once the initial crisis passes and operations begin to stabilize, increased emphasis is given to targeting, but targeting those in greatest need has proved to be extremely difficult in many situations.
26. Targeting has been particularly difficult where typical objective aid criteria have been at variance with local traditions (as in Sudan); where insecurity has been very high (Liberia and much of Somalia); where food aid is used by authorities for political or military objectives (Bosnia), and as people gradually become more food-secure (after the peace agreements in Angola and Cambodia).
27. Similar—and related—difficulties arise in relation to the choice of implementation mechanisms and partners. WFP has cooperated with government entities, where available, and with NGO partners. Collaboration has generally been good in spite of occasional operational difficulties and misunderstandings. Experiences of working with newly-created local NGOs have varied widely, being successful, if demanding, in Monrovia, and problematical in other parts of Liberia, in Afghanistan, Somalia and southern Sudan.





28. Meanwhile, direct distributions by WFP have been increasing, sometimes due to a lack of reliable, willing partners, sometimes in an effort to increase efficiency and/or control (and visibility). In the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) southern sector, the distribution of over 90 percent of WFP food in 1998 was organized by teams employed by WFP. WFP has directly organized almost all general relief distributions in Somalia since 1997 and in Tajikistan since 1994.
29. In some cases distributions have been made only to women. While in principle a good approach which has worked well in some settings, this was found in Liberia and southern Sudan to expose the women to risks of attack. Family group distribution mechanisms, used successfully in some refugee camps, have also been applied in some areas of southern Sudan but have not yet been widely tested in unstable conflict situations.

### Misappropriation

30. There have been many reports of misappropriation of food supplies in conflict situations, including the diversion of food to soldiers, the large-scale sale of food aid commodities on local markets or in neighbouring areas, and the theft or withholding of certain quantities from beneficiaries. Apart from losses during transport and storage, commodities have been misappropriated in various ways during and after distribution to beneficiaries. Widely varying figures have been quoted for the extent of losses and diversion/misappropriation in different operations, but hard data are rare except for those (relatively few) occasions when a large quantity has 'disappeared' in a single incident.
31. There is no doubt that significant quantities have gone astray—or are misused—in operations in conflict zones. Most practitioners believe that this is inevitable in such environments notwithstanding the range of counter-measures taken. The real questions concern how to minimize diversions and misuse, what should be considered unacceptable, and what consequences remedial measures might have for the intended beneficiaries.
32. Responses to incidents of misappropriation have varied between and within operations. In some cases protests have been made, warnings issued and/or distributions to a locality suspended for at least a short period. In a few cases, stolen commodities (and agency property) have been returned. In other cases, incidents have effectively been tolerated.

**Recommendation III-1:** *WFP, in consultation with its major NGO partners, other IASC members, donors and relevant research institutions, should:*

- a) *review experience, approaches and practical methodologies, and refine existing guidelines, for assessments and the targeting, distribution and monitoring of food and food-related assistance in conflict situations. Consideration of the political, social and economic context must be included, also aspects relating to the choice of commodities;*
- b) *review the effectiveness of different programme intervention strategies in improving needy people's access to food in insecure, conflict-affected areas, draw lessons and, to the extent possible, develop guidelines. Costs, expected benefits, possible side effects and risks should be analysed explicitly. Possibilities and general criteria for market interventions should be included; and*
- c) *identify instances where food aid has had unintended and undesirable effects, review the effectiveness of measures taken by different agencies to avoid such effects and the usefulness of existing tools and methodologies for analysing the actual and potential effects of interventions.*



*In relation to all of the above, WFP should: develop concise “lessons-learned” case studies; seek the widest possible consensus with major implementing partners and donors; provide country offices and staff with practical guidance, check-lists, other tools, and training, and ensure prompt technical support for country offices as and when needed.*

**Recommendation III-2:** *WFP should monitor and systematically inform beneficiaries, local authorities, faction leaders and donors of incidents and their consequences. It should compile and publish its own estimates of the levels of misuse/misappropriation and targeting errors. WFP should consider the establishment of a system of reporting on the misappropriation of food assistance within the current system of reporting post-delivery losses generally.*

33. The full report also discusses objectives and programme strategies, the selection of NGO partners, working with national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, and support to activities promoting reconciliation. It provides additional recommendations in relation to:
- a) explicit recognition of the need to initiate assistance on the basis of limited information and rough estimates;
  - b) agreeing objectives and intervention strategies with representatives of communities and warring parties, and disseminating information widely on entitlements and criteria;
  - c) inter-agency agreement on a case-by-case basis on the provision of any kind of incentives for government and other workers, and envisaging from the outset the manner of eventually phasing them out; and
  - d) the inclusion in monitoring reports of estimates of reports of misappropriation and of the levels of inclusion and exclusion errors in distributions.

## IV. SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

### Staff Safety and Security

34. WFP staff and other humanitarian workers in complex emergencies have faced threats, intimidation, kidnapping, and risks of being killed or injured deliberately or by cross-fire, bombing, shelling or landmines. These conflict-related risks come on top of those of accidents, robbery and medical emergencies that take their toll in all field operations. Sexual assaults are also known to have occurred, although they are rarely reported. In the period from June 1997 to July 1998, ten WFP staff were killed in complex emergency countries.
35. There has not yet been any systematic analysis within the United Nations of the number, nature and causes of security incidents affecting staff of United Nations and other humanitarian agencies in conflict situations. Indeed too few data have been compiled to make meaningful analysis possible. However, a recent independent study found no discernible global patterns in security incidents affecting relief workers. While comparisons with other agencies are not possible, the heavy toll in 1997/98 shows that WFP staff—particularly local staff—have been at high risk of being killed in the last few years, with most of the deaths resulting from ambushes or robberies.
36. Security arrangements have varied considerably between countries and have evolved over time depending on the initiatives taken by individual Designated Officials and heads of agencies, and on the resources they have mobilized for the purpose. UNHCR, UNICEF,



UNDP, WHO and WFP have taken measures—committed resources—to improve security and reduce risks for their field operations individually and/or collectively. Measures have included: the fielding of professional security officers, some funded on an inter-agency basis and recruited by UNSECOORD or UNDP, others funded and recruited by individual agencies; improved radio communications; some local training; and the provision of special vehicles and protective equipment for staff, as appropriate.

37. Within WFP, important security measures were initiated in 1998, initially in the Great Lakes region, then globally through the aegis of the newly created field Security Task Force. All country offices have been encouraged to undertake assessments of actual and potential risks, and current security arrangements. An incident reporting system has been introduced based on that already used by UNICEF and UNHCR. Security has also been greatly enhanced by the deep-field communications developed by WFP to support its logistic operations. Since late 1998, security is a required component of all EMOP and PRRO documents for complex/conflict situations. (It will also be a required element of all United Nations consolidated appeals from 2000.)
38. Security awareness training (SAT) for all WFP staff started early in 1999, drawing on the experience and existing materials of UNHCR and UNICEF, and in coordination with UNSECOORD. Over 5,000 WFP staff will have received basic SAT by the end of 1999. Specialized training modules are being developed for managers and other staff who have special security-related responsibilities.
39. NGOs have also been taking initiatives in relation to security, although many have a different perspective on risks and sometimes choose to stay and continue working when United Nations personnel are evacuated. A training package developed by a coalition of NGOs including some of WFP's main implementing partners emphasizes the importance of: relationships (both within the aid community and with the local populations); image (how the agency is perceived as a result of its behaviour and actions); and the definition of an appropriate combination of security strategies (including acceptance, protection and/or deterrence, as appropriate) based on a thorough analysis of the specific context, threats and agency vulnerabilities.

**Recommendation IV-1:** *Continuing the existing close collaboration with UNSECOORD, OCHA and the other operational United Nations agencies, WFP should:*

- a) *encourage and cooperate with UNSECOORD in systematically and continuously monitoring and analysing the precise nature and apparent causes of security incidents affecting the personnel and operations of the humanitarian agencies, based on standard inter-agency incident reporting arrangements; and*
- b) *review experience and seek consensus with UNSECOORD and other operational agencies on arrangements for the assignment of security officers at the country level which satisfy the need for a unified system while meeting the specific programme and operational needs of the operational agencies.*

**Recommendation IV-2:** *WFP, in consultation with UNSECOORD, OCHA and the other operational United Nations agencies, should:*

- a) *organize consultations, internationally and at the country level, with the Programme's main NGO partners to review each other's assessments of threats and vulnerabilities associated with the delivery of food assistance, and the effectiveness of measures taken to reduce the risks; and*



- b) continue and refine on an ongoing basis SAT training for WFP staff, learning from the experience of training organized by NGOs as well as that of WFP itself, and develop and deliver the planned specialized modules as quickly as possible with particular emphasis on risk assessments and the selection of appropriate risk reduction strategies.*
40. The full report provides additional recommendations for action concerning:
- a) continuity and hand-overs between security officers;
  - b) the organization of evacuations, including the selection of essential United Nations staff to remain;
  - c) guidelines on payment for guard services;
  - d) collaboration with NGO partners in relation to security, responses to security incidents and evacuations, whether they have signed up with the United Nations security system or not;
  - e) communications facilities (minimum standards from the beginning of field operations) and capacity to install and support such facilities and information systems such as the deep-field mailing system and its derivatives; and
  - f) the consolidation and expansion of collaboration and systems-integration in communications with other United Nations agencies.

### **Delivering Food, Preventing Losses**

41. Getting large quantities of food into insecure/conflict-affected areas and delivering it to partners at agreed hand-over points or directly to individual distribution sites, has presented enormous challenges. The achievements have been remarkable, but the costs high and problems frequent.
42. Commercial transporters have been relied on in many cases but it has been found necessary to operate primarily with WFP's and/or partners' own trucks in several situations where adequate commercial transport has not been available or transporters have been unwilling to operate. Convoy systems have been used in most cases for increased security.
43. Airlifts and airdrops have been key elements in Angola, former Yugoslavia (organized by UNHCR) and OLS southern sector. In all cases, commercially-chartered aircraft have carried the vast majority of the cargo. Barge and train convoys have served parts of southern Sudan intermittently, but with frequent interruptions due to security problems. Chartered coastal vessels were a vital element of the regional logistics network (and security system) in the Liberia region.
44. To speed up deliveries, reduce costs and/or to ensure the continuity of operations, WFP has repaired roads and bridges (e.g. Afghanistan, Liberia, Uganda); rehabilitated or provided additional equipment and arranged management assistance for ports (Mozambique in the eighties, Liberia 1993/95, Somalia, 1992); provided support for rail infrastructure (in Tanzania for the Great Lakes operation), and limited inputs for airports (e.g. Afghanistan, Liberia, Lokichoggio Kenya for the southern Sudan operation). Joint logistics operations have been set up with UNHCR in Pakistan (for Afghan refugees) and the Great Lakes.
45. Despite extensive and repetitive negotiations to ensure safe passage, trucks and escort vehicles have occasionally hit mines and been caught in local fighting, while local commanders have demanded taxes in many places. But the major causes of losses in the delivery chain have been ambushes of convoys and looting of warehouses.



46. WFP field offices have used various types of armed escorts to protect convoys. Many humanitarian personnel consider the use of armed escorts to be contrary to the humanitarian ethic and even to implicitly condone the use of armed force in general. Others, including many in WFP, maintain the imperative to deliver assistance to the needy using any means necessary. The Red Cross movement has a stricter policy of using armed escorts only to provide protection against bandits and common criminals in a situation of general law-and-order breakdown and with the approval of the party or authority controlling the territories concerned. Where there is no discipline and there is widespread banditry, the choice is effectively between using armed escorts and not operating.
47. A recent Canadian study addressed to NGOs has proposed that, in the absence of publicly-funded security and given the evident reluctance of the major powers to commit troops to provide security in countries in which they have no vital national interests, serious consideration should be given to engaging private security forces to protect humanitarian operations in situations where more cost-effective options are not available or feasible.
48. Other measures to reduce losses during transport and storage have included: improved physical security of warehouses; improved commodity control systems; convoys, sometimes with armed escorts; provision of less attractive commodities, and the holding of only minimal stocks in field locations (which reduces the risks of stocks being lost but increases the risks for the beneficiaries of any interruption in the local supply pipeline).

***Recommendation IV-3: WFP should:***

- a) promote the establishment of—and ensure its capacity to take the lead in establishing—joint United Nations logistics operations in future situations where logistics are particularly difficult and the consolidation of effort and resources is critical; and*
- b) establish guidelines on the use of armed guards and escorts in WFP/UN humanitarian operations in agreement with other United Nations agencies and in consultation with major donors.*
49. The full report provides additional recommendations concerning:
- a) capturing the Programme’s logistic experience and lessons learned, including documenting, together with UNHCR, that of the United Nations joint logistics operations in the Great Lakes region;
- b) ensuring adequate control systems from the onset of all future transport and warehousing operations; and
- c) reviewing policy and practice, and consulting with donors, regarding the funding of logistic improvement activities (whether as special operations or through LTSH).

## **Mobilizing Staff and Resources**

50. Finding staff with the right experience and skills for work in a conflict environment has been a problem for all humanitarian agencies, including WFP. Managers lament the time it takes to mobilize additional staff, the heavy reliance on personnel with little or no previous WFP experience, and the inability of WFP, due to funding considerations, to offer contracts of more than a few months at a time in many situations, which makes it difficult to attract and keep good professional staff. They emphasize the importance of good inter-personal skills and of all staff understanding—and demonstrating sensitivity to—the underlying social, political and economic environment in which they work. However, the majority of WFP staff working in conflict situations receive little or no organized briefing on the history and social context of the situations they are “parachuted” into.



51. In terms of food commodities, notwithstanding the obvious achievements in mobilizing and delivering massive quantities of food in recent years (e.g. in the Great Lakes region, 1994-98), problems remain in keeping the pipeline flowing for protracted operations and, sometimes, in responding rapidly to increases in needs. The regional management of resources in Liberia and neighbouring countries (1991-99) and in the Great Lakes region (1994-98), and the computerized pipeline management system developed for the purpose, greatly facilitated both the maintenance of pipelines to the priority areas in the various countries concerned and response to changing needs as refugees and internally displaced persons moved. The regional budget enabled WFP to flexibly allocate and reallocate commodity and LTSH resources so that “food followed the affected beneficiaries”. Recently, however, flexibility has been reduced by increased earmarking by donors and WFP has had difficulty in maintaining supplies to certain areas/programmes in both these regions.

***Recommendation IV-4: WFP should:***

- a) develop stand-by arrangements with its major partners, improve its existing arrangements with United Nations Volunteers (UNV), and enhance its own systems to rapidly screen candidates and mobilize staff with the necessary personal qualities and experience for complex operations, as necessary initiate modifications of relevant United Nations common system regulations;*
- b) in each situation, provide all newly-arriving staff, national and international, with a detailed briefing on the social and political background to the situation, the policy of the United Nations, the Programme’s specific mission and objectives, and personal conduct; and*
- c) review the inter-personal and negotiating skills component of the SAT and ensure that adequate training is provided for all staff in, or being sent into, conflict emergency situations.*

***Recommendation IV-5: WFP should review internally and with donors the performance and constraints in resourcing complex emergency operations including problems arising from earmarking and in relation to borrowing. WFP should propose, and donors support, regional programmes wherever the management of resources on a regional basis can improve responsiveness to the needs of beneficiaries in a changing situation.***

52. The full report provides additional recommendations concerning:

- a) protecting local staff from unreasonable pressures and risks;
- b) providing professional personnel management staff in any major operation, especially when extensive local recruitment is to be undertaken; and
- c) reviewing the experiences of regional management in the Liberia and Great Lakes regions and developing procedures to accommodate differential rations for different groups.

## V. UNDERLYING ISSUES

### Ground Rules, Principles and Ethical Dilemmas

53. All organizations providing assistance in areas affected by conflict, especially civil conflict, are confronted by a number of dilemmas. They are particularly acute for WFP and



its partners, given the importance of food for the health and survival of people in many cases, the considerations discussed in part I above, and the scale and costs of food assistance operations. Dilemmas include: What risks should staff be expected to take? Where should the balance lie between staff security and the needs of—and agencies' responsibility towards—beneficiaries? What levels of losses and misappropriation can be accepted? What, if any, principles should govern the provision of humanitarian assistance and what should be done if they are not respected? Should conditions ever be attached to the provision of humanitarian assistance? Is it possible to be neutral and impartial in the face of gross violations of human rights? Should they adjust their programmes in response to such abuses or other political considerations? What kind of relationships should WFP have with non-State parties to a conflict? To what extent, if at all, should the risk of undesirable side effects influence decisions on the provision of humanitarian assistance? When, if ever, should assistance be suspended, or not given?

54. There has been little formal discussion of such questions within WFP and staff have as yet received little guidance. However, staff in the field are increasingly confronted with these issues as WFP has progressively taken more direct responsibility for delivering food supplies to multiple extended delivery points within conflict-affected areas and, in some cases, for selecting and distributing to beneficiaries. Previously, most of the “front-line” problems were faced by implementing partners. Increasingly, WFP staff are having to face up to them, and the associated difficult decisions, as well as to international demands for accountability—accountability not only for the resources themselves but also for the impact of interventions.
55. Human rights, protection and peace-building are central to the “principles” debate, and the focus of ongoing discussions linked to the Secretary-General’s Reform Programme. Some donors are emphasizing human rights considerations. A strategic framework has been adopted (by the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination) for Afghanistan, intended to integrate humanitarian, development, political and human rights concerns and activities on the basis of shared assessments, goals and principles to which the whole assistance community subscribes. One is shortly to be prepared for Sierra Leone.
56. Whether and when to suspend assistance in the face of serious looting and misappropriation is a major issue. Most “humanitarians” reject the idea of conditionality in the provision of humanitarian assistance. But assistance has been suspended by WFP and other agencies, at least temporarily, in response to security incidents and/or misappropriations. In many situations, there is no functioning or effective judicial system, and the only real sanction that can be applied is the suspension of assistance. But such action may punish the intended beneficiary population rather than the perpetrators. In practice, suspension is always a judgement call. The vulnerability of the civilian population to any interruption in food supplies would be a key determinant.

***Recommendation V-1: WFP should:***

- a) *undertake an in-depth review of how existing ground rules and codes of conduct (both international and country-specific) have been applied in relation to food assistance in complex/conflict emergencies;*
- b) *define and provide guidance and training to all WFP staff concerning the general principles of WFP’s humanitarian action, and develop a code of conduct for WFP staff in conflict situations. This must be done in close consultation and coordination with OCHA and other IASC members;*



- c) *review with other members of the IASC the implications for humanitarian agencies of the mainstreaming of human rights within the work of the United Nations and provide necessary information and guidance to all WFP staff; and*
- d) *work with partners and other concerned institutions to try to assess the effects and effectiveness of suspensions of assistance in particular circumstances, and with the ERC and OCHA and, at the country level, the Humanitarian Coordinators, to agree concerted responses to incidents which might justify consideration of withdrawal.*

**Recommendation V-2:** *The WFP Operations Department should establish an inter-divisional task force and associated consultative group of field-based staff, and develop a specific work plan to follow up on the issues and recommendations presented in this report and the corresponding full report. The work plan should include joint action with other agencies and arrangements to benefit from the experience of other internationally recognized groups, as appropriate.*

57. The full report also recommends establishing mechanisms for regular inter-divisional exchange of information and coordination in relation to complex emergency issues and enhancing the internal electronic network to share the findings of studies and evaluations relating to emergencies, particularly complex emergencies.

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## EPILOGUE

58. The issues discussed in this report are fundamental to a large part of the Programme's operations today as well as to the lives and well-being of many people in conflict-affected areas. They need to be considered, analysed and acted on systematically, on an inter-divisional basis, within WFP. The wealth of experience within WFP relating to the provision of food in complex emergencies needs to be captured on a continuous basis. Individual staff as well as the Programme as an institution must also be enabled to benefit from the ideas and experience of other institutions and organizations.

