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Programme

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SUMMARY OF THE WORK OF THE ANNUAL SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD, 1998



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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR 1997 (1998/EB.A/1)

1. In introducing her Annual Report for 1997, submitted to the Board for consideration and approval, the Executive Director highlighted the work performed by WFP in relief and development activities as well as the Programme's continuous efforts towards improving its efficiency and effectiveness. She indicated that in accordance with the Board's recommendation, the report integrated most of the contents of the former report on "WFP emergency relief activities", and that it had been streamlined.
2. The Board acknowledged with satisfaction that WFP had delivered 50 percent of its development assistance to least developed countries and over 90 percent to low-income, food-deficit countries. It welcomed WFP's emphasis on the role of women in its food aid activities.
3. While commending the structure and the contents of the report, which paralleled the structure of the Strategic and Financial Plan, the Board highlighted some issues of particular significance:
 - concern regarding the decrease of multilateral contributions for development and increase of directed contributions;
 - a need for maintaining resources for development at an adequate level, seeing to it that these resources are increased, and establishing a link between emergency and development projects;
 - a need to closely link all WFP programmes to national programmes and objectives. National development programmes must be the starting point for all WFP interventions;
 - the importance of the people-centred approach (particularly children and women) and geographical targeting to the poorest groups and poorest countries, especially continents experiencing structural problems;
 - the importance of WFP's active participation in the United Nations reform process and in strengthening inter-agency collaboration with sub-regional organizations;
 - the need to strengthen evaluation activities, in particular the evaluation of project/programme impact; and
 - nutrition issues and the critical role of micronutrients.
4. Some suggestions for future reports were made: placing greater emphasis on the difficulties and problems encountered by WFP in the implementation of its activities in the field (effectiveness and efficiency) and providing an analysis of lessons learned; highlighting the practical implications for WFP of United Nations reform, inter-agency collaboration and coordination in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); analysing more systematically the trends and evolution of activities; improving the presentation and contents of the statistical tables in the Annexes to the report; giving a longer-range view in an effort to understand the causes of humanitarian disasters; providing more information on WFP activities regarding follow-up to the Beijing Conference, the World Food Summit and the Copenhagen Summit; and achieving a better geographic balance in its staff recruitment policy.



ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD TO ECOSOC AND THE FAO COUNCIL ON ITS ACTIVITIES IN 1997 (1998/EB.A/2)

5. The report was well received. One representative suggested that the section on the budget could have been more substantial, and requested details on WFP assistance to countries trying to establish national food assistance programmes. The Secretariat provided details on such assistance in Papua New Guinea and Paraguay.

FROM CRISIS TO RECOVERY (1998/EB.A/3)

6. The Board welcomed and appreciated the timely presentation of issues in the report. It noted that WFP, with its dual mandate, is well placed to make the link from relief to development, that the Programme has gained valuable experience in this area and that there is a strong rationale to use food to rebuild lives.
7. The Board reiterated the need to ensure that food aid is an appropriate resource in each recovery situation. The Secretariat indicated that recovery would either lead to an exit strategy or to a development programme, depending on the country-specific situation.
8. The Board emphasized the importance of coordination and partnerships, definition of agency roles and complementarity of assistance. The need to strengthen local capacities was also stressed. WFP should actively seek partnerships, collaborate closely with all organizations, and participate in the Common Strategic Framework (CSF) and UNDAF processes. It was noted that WFP cannot wait in every case until the CSF process is in place before developing a recovery strategy. The benefit of working with NGOs was noted.
9. The Secretariat noted the concern of some representatives regarding the time allocated to prepare a recovery strategy. Based on WFP's operational experience, 18 months would be an appropriate time to complete the process. However, when feasible, WFP would complete the strategy earlier.
10. Some representatives expressed concern about creating a category for funding for recovery. It was noted that it is important to encourage developmental approaches in a recovery operation without jeopardizing funding for development. The Secretariat emphasized the importance of retaining flexibility with respect to funding options for each donor to use mechanisms most suitable to their situation.
11. The Board underlined that WFP's roles in demining should be restricted to activities where food aid complements the work of other agencies, for example to rehabilitate lands after they have been cleared of mines. WFP has neither the means nor the capacity to undertake demining activities and should only intervene in those situations where food aid can strengthen the effectiveness of partner activities. As regards demobilization, WFP did not supply food aid to soldiers before they were demobilized.
12. Non-food items (training, production tools for development activities used directly by project beneficiaries) needed to implement recovery activities, such as for current WFP development activities, would be funded as part of the direct operational costs. The Secretariat pointed out that this issue had been discussed on previous occasions.
13. The Secretariat noted the concern for a broader consideration of environmental issues. A WFP environmental policy document which is in the process of finalization, will reflect the need to focus on prevention rather than on the rehabilitation of degraded areas.



14. The Secretariat noted the concern for incorporating results indicators in recovery operations and invited representatives to share their experiences with WFP.
15. It was agreed that each recovery strategy would be reviewed periodically to assure its effectiveness.
16. The experience of implementing the procedures introduced through these decisions will be reviewed after three years to assess their effectiveness.

EMERGING ISSUES RELEVANT TO WFP (1998/EB.A/4)

WFP development interventions revitalized

17. The Board welcomed the discussion on food aid and development. There was consensus that a thorough discussion of the issues was needed. It was noted that the issues identified in the paper presented to the Board by the Secretariat were correctly focused. Representatives expressed concern over the decline of development resources and stressed the need to offset this trend.
18. The Board stressed that WFP food aid interventions need to achieve a developmental impact. Food aid is a scarce resource, which must compete with other forms of development assistance for funding.
19. Partnerships should be given high priority and WFP should seek complementarity using food aid with other resources. Collaboration with NGOs is important.
20. Representatives urged that cost-effectiveness of food aid interventions be considered in relation to the impact achieved, and that a better monitoring and evaluation system be established with a view to better assessing the impact of project activities.
21. The review needs to:
 - evaluate if food aid is competitive with other resources and demonstrate if it has a unique role to play in development;
 - identify where it has special advantages or disadvantages as a development resource;
 - clarify the niche of WFP in development and its role, considering its dual mandate; and
 - take account of the distinction between food and food aid.
22. Food aid can be an efficient tool for sustainable development—to combat short-term hunger, for example, by feeding well targeted vulnerable groups—and for addressing longer-term production and income generation requirements.
23. The Board welcomed the Secretariat's proposal for a consultative process that is clear, open and involves all key actors in a frank discussion. Such a process would involve donor and recipient countries, NGOs, implementing partners, beneficiaries, bilateral donors and other United Nations agencies. It should be based on a short, constructive and efficient way to discuss issues, and be consistent with the World Food Summit Plan of Action.
24. The consultative process should be organized as quickly as possible and place particular weight on experience with food aid, drawing upon the lessons learned by a range of practitioners, without forgetting relevant research results. The need for clearly defined roles for the Board and the Secretariat was emphasized.



25. The Board endorsed the timetable and the consultative process proposed by the Secretariat—to be open to all Members of the Programme—to review the role of food aid for development. The Board invited the Bureau to consider, with the Secretariat, ways of incorporating into the approved consultation process the concerns reflected in the proposal by the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries.

United Nations reform: field-level collaboration in the provision of development assistance

26. The Board stressed the importance of common programming, field coordination and joint action, and commended the Programme-wide initiatives and actions in support of UNDAF.
27. In regard to joint programming in crisis countries, the Board noted the recent decision to apply the first Strategic Framework exercise to Afghanistan. The Board endorsed this initiative, to which it attached great importance, encouraged WFP to play a leading role, stressed the importance of field-based programming based on needs rather than mandates, and observed that, in case of a positive outcome, one of the implications could be the sharing of responsibilities between the Board and the Afghanistan Programming Board in the field.

The multilateral character of WFP development activities

28. The Board stressed the importance of maintaining the multilateral character of WFP and expressed its concern for the declining proportion of multilateral contributions, particularly to the development category. It was further recognized that the issues of the multilateral character of WFP and food aid in development are linked, and that the consultation process on development would lack meaning if it were not accompanied by a commitment to predictable funding; otherwise, the implementation of Board-approved projects would be adversely affected and with it the development programme as a whole.
29. One representative suggested that the resourcing framework should not place obstacles in the way of donors who wish to support WFP development activities through the directed multilateral window, and that in these specific cases, it is important to allow WFP a maximum of flexibility in programming to enable it to maintain its cost-effectiveness. The Board recognized the importance of having a focused approach and coordination on these issues with the other United Nations funds and programmes. The Board also recognized the link between this issue and the Resource and Long-term Financing process, where mechanisms/incentives for encouraging contributions through the multilateral window should be explored, in order to reflect the fact that multilateral contributions allow WFP to be more efficient.

EVALUATION REPORTS: WORK PLAN FOR 1998–99 (1998/EB.A/5)

30. In considering WFP's 1998–99 Evaluation Work Plan, the Board reiterated the importance of evaluation activities, and expressed the need to reinforce the Office of Evaluation in terms of capacity and resources in order to successfully implement this ambitious plan. The Board noted the importance of evaluations of development projects for its current review of the role of food aid in development. It stressed that appropriate indicators should be included in all new projects, and that the collection of baseline data was essential for the evaluation of impact on project beneficiaries. The Board also noted



the importance of recipient governments and beneficiaries themselves as valuable resources for evaluation missions.

31. The Secretariat outlined the various basic criteria applied in evaluation programmes to establish priorities. It informed the Board that WFP had initiated the evaluation of emergency humanitarian assistance programmes. Three representatives indicated their countries' willingness to take part in mid-term evaluations of country programmes.

REPORT ON POST-DELIVERY LOSSES (PERIOD OCTOBER 1996-SEPTEMBER 1997) (1998/EB.A/6)

32. In considering the report on post-delivery losses for the period October 1996 to September 1997, the Board welcomed WFP's continuing endeavours to reduce losses and encouraged the Programme to increase its efforts in this direction. It noted that WFP is expected to implement the Commodity Tracking System during 1998. It encouraged WFP to: a) review and amend the Basic Agreements with recipient countries to encourage a swift and effective response to losses; b) inform in writing the relevant governments of the Board's concern on losses when these exceed two percent of the total quantity handled in a given year; c) continue to ensure that no food found unfit for human consumption reach the market; and d) work closely with recipient governments to recover losses. The representative of Algeria deplored the imprecise information contained in the report with respect to losses incurred in Algeria, and the generalizations made therein.
33. In response to the above, the Secretariat clarified that the figures given in the report were based on information provided to WFP by the Algerian Red Crescent, which is responsible for handling the logistics of the operation, and that these losses did not relate to the Saharaoui refugee operation, but to the emergency operation for the assistance of displaced persons from Mali and Niger in the southern borders of Algeria.

REPORTS BY THE JOINT INSPECTION UNIT (1998/EB.A/7)

34. The Board welcomed the Chairman of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and expressed appreciation for his intervention. It was noted that this was the first opportunity to have an exchange of views with the Head of the JIU. Representatives observed that the seven JIU reports were too bulky and needed to be made more readily accessible to readers through the inclusion of executive summaries and more highlighting of critical areas requiring follow-up action. With a view to achieving a better knowledge of JIU, questions were raised as to how it could be more effective in ensuring proper follow-up to reports. Clarifications were also sought about JIU's recommendation that a report on common services in Rome be prepared. The Secretariat was asked to provide more information to the Board on possibilities for further outsourcing of services, especially within the context of the Financial Management Improvement Programme (FMIP).



COMPOSITION OF WFP INTERNATIONAL STAFF—PERSONNEL STATISTICS REPORT AS AT 31 JANUARY 1998 (1998/EB.A/8)

35. The Board took note of the Personnel statistics report as at 31 January 1998, and expressed satisfaction with the information provided. The report was considered to be comprehensive, providing a good overview of the WFP professional workforce.
36. The increased representation of women among Professional staff was favourably commented upon. However, some representatives expressed regret that nationals from economically developing countries were not represented in adequate numbers and requested that more efforts be made by the Secretariat to correct this imbalance. One representative also noted a certain imbalance at headquarters, with regard to a greater presence of nationals from economically developed countries than from economically developing countries. Another representative asked that in future the Secretariat take into account the opinions expressed and issues raised.
37. The Secretariat explained that the Programme has a general guiding principle that 40 percent of the international professional staff should originate from economically developing countries and 50 percent should be women. The Board encouraged the Secretariat to continue its efforts in achieving these objectives. It was also explained that WFP has no specific staff quota system by nationality.
38. Regarding vacancies open to external candidates, some representatives asked that the Board be informed periodically of the results of internal and external recruitments. The Secretariat agreed to do this.
39. The Executive Director concluded the discussions by reiterating the Programme's commitment to reach the gender and geographical distribution targets. In this connection, a letter would be issued to the hiring managers to enhance their awareness of and commitment to WFP's recruitment policy. The Board was requested to send its proposals of candidates for inclusion in the Roster, JPO positions and for specific vacancy announcements for consideration by managers.

LOCAL PURCHASES OF FOOD AND NON-FOOD ITEMS (1998/EB.A/9)

40. The Board stressed its support for local purchasing of food and non-food items as well as for triangular transactions, as they are a key element for promoting the economies of developing countries. The Secretariat provided explanations on the mechanism used in local purchases. Several representatives suggested that capacity-building in the area of evaluation/analysis of local market conditions be emphasized to avoid any detrimental side effects (disruption of local markets, evolution of prices on the market, quality problems, WFP's comparative advantages for local purchases in developing countries and for purchases of non-food items). The Secretariat would follow up on suggestions by the Board to carry out a study covering the last two or three years and detailing local purchasing processes in developing countries, globally, and case by case.
41. Concerning the implementation of the aforementioned study, the Board recommended the participation of WFP's partners and United Nations organizations (FAO, World Bank, IFPRI). Some representatives stressed the importance of inter-agency coordination and collaboration in this area and asked that the document be improved in 1999 by adding information on losses related to local purchases.



OTHER BUSINESS (1998/EB.A/10)

Report of the Working Group on the Distribution of Seats

42. The Board was informed of the work of the Group, which met in March and May 1998. In the course of five meetings, the Group had come up with five options. In addition, the Board was informed that a similar group was established by ECOSOC in New York with the same objective.
43. The Chairman of the East Europe Group pointed out that his regional group was prepared to pursue negotiations to reach a rapid compromise solution—a consensus decision.

Report of the Working Group on the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board

44. The Chairman of the Group informed the Board that, in the course of three meetings, the Group had discussed in detail the nature of the Rules of Procedure and the working methods to be followed. The Group has consulted the FAO Legal Counsel, who has examined the Rules of Procedure of other Funds and Programmes of the United Nations. However, according to members of the Group, issues relating to the effectiveness of the Board could be treated separately and subsequently referred to the Bureau of the Board for a further analysis with a view to receiving different opinions. The Group will present the conclusions of its work in a document to be distributed before October 1998 and considered by the Board at its Third Regular Session.

