

Opening Remarks

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In today's presentation, I would like to give you an overview of some of the regional initiatives we are undertaking and regional partnerships we are engaged in. I will also take this opportunity to highlight some persistent funding shortfalls in the region, and what consequences these have on the people we serve.

Emergency Preparedness

You have heard from me before that Asia is exposed to more natural disasters than anywhere else in the world, with disasters increasing in frequency and magnitude. Just this year, we have seen devastating earthquakes in Pakistan and the Philippines, as well as the tropical storms and flooding that have lashed Bangladesh, India, Laos and Cambodia.

This is why we have been developing a regional preparedness strategy for 5 highest risk countries together with OCHA. These 5 countries are - Bangladesh and Nepal in South Asia; and Indonesia, Philippines and Myanmar in Southeast Asia which could be hit by catastrophic disasters requiring international interventions.

Our assessment missions have identified potential locations that could serve as inter-agency 'staging areas' for a large-scale response operation. These plans have been shared with national authorities, regional military responders, and with UN agencies and NGOs in an effort to align the logistics component of an eventual response.

The role of regional institutions in emergencies is increasingly important. For example, we have been approached by the Association of South East Asian Nations – ASEAN requesting us to collectively build the capacity of national disaster management authorities in the ASEAN countries. By doing this, we support ASEAN's ambitious plan to grow into an efficient regional responder to disasters.

In 2012, ASEAN, as a regional responder, started prepositioning their emergency supplies in our Humanitarian Response Depot in Malaysia.

Since then, operational support equipment and relief items belonging to ASEAN have been dispatched in response to earthquakes in Myanmar and the Philippines, and monsoon floods in Cambodia with the help of WFP.

Urban programming – a new regional focus

Asian Development Bank reports that half of Asia's population living below the poverty line resides in urban areas.

The effect of urbanization is that the demographics of hunger are slowly changing. Food insecure rural populations are migrating to urban areas, and *remain* food and nutrition insecure there. We must adapt our strategies and tools to match this changing reality.

By 2050, it is estimated that global urban populations will grow by 2.6 billion people. As 60 percent of this growth is set to occur in the Asia region, we have recognized an immediate need to begin adapting traditional, mainly rural food assistance strategies to the unique and complex contexts of densely-populated urban environments.

We have therefore started two urban programming appraisals in Bangladesh and the Philippines. These scoping exercises will identify strategic entry points for WFP engagement in urban areas, ensuring that our activities complement existing efforts by local government, NGO as well as UN partners.

Middle-Income Country Strategy

Another important initiative for WFP is the Middle-Income Country strategy. Globally, significant levels of food and nutrition insecurity are hiding in plain sight in Middle-Income Countries, and for this reason we are planning to pilot this initiative in India, Indonesia and Cambodia.

The purpose of the initiative is to improve our collaboration with these governments in addressing the food security and nutrition issues they face. This would deepen our understanding of what kind of support would be appropriate and effective for us to provide, direct or indirect.

The Middle-Income Country initiative could be our big chance to influence major government safety-net programmes; by helping to improve targeting, or boost the nutritional quality of food transfers. We are already doing this in India where WFP does not provide any direct food assistance but maintains an innovative partnership.

There are over 300 million undernourished people in India and Indonesia alone, out of some 800 million globally. If we manage to adapt our assistance to the context of these countries, then over time we could come a long way in reducing the number of hungry people in the world.

On Nutrition

We are working regionally with UNICEF on developing a proposal for a stunting prevention programme. The aim is to implement a series of pilots that can be scaled up in selected countries. While the Scaling Up Nutrition or SUN movement with its focus on the first 1,000 days is gaining good momentum, we feel that comprehensive actionable plans are still missing in many countries.

The partnership between WFP and UNICEF is based on the comparative advantages of both organizations on the ground working at community level, while we would work also closely with other SUN partners like FAO and WHO.

We are at this time actively soliciting funds for this regional stunting initiative. As Asia carries the highest global burden of undernutrition - 60 percent of all stunted children in the world, we would like proactively seek donor interest for sponsoring the plan and pilot projects.

FAO

Talking about partnerships, I know that our Board Members have special interest in the collaboration between Rome Based Agencies. So let me explain how such collaboration is pursued at the regional level.

WFP's Regional Bureau is partnering closely with FAO's Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific both located in Bangkok, Thailand. .

Since 2010, we have held annual consultations to improve our partnership and identify new areas of collaboration. Conclusions and action points from these consultations attended by technical advisors of both organizations are agreed upon and signed off jointly by the Regional Representative for FAO and myself, and these are shared with the Country Directors of both FAO and WFP for their action.

Currently, we collaborate with FAO in 11 countries in the region at the country level. At the regional level, joint activities range from conducting food security assessment missions; developing Integrated Food Security Phase Classification or IPC, co-leading clusters, and jointly working on national food and nutrition strategies and action plans for host governments through regional high level meetings.

Shortfalls

I will end this presentation by talking about the funding shortfalls affecting the operations in Asia. Too many programmes suffer from shortfalls of more than 50 percent and I will only highlight few of them.

When faced with significant resource constraints, the country offices are forced to scale down programmes, or suspend activities. Rations might have to be reduced, or commodities taken out of the food basket entirely. Many country offices have to prioritize one beneficiary group over another.

In the case of Sri Lanka, this means assisting moderately acute malnourished children enrolled in supplementary feeding – but not the food insecure pregnant and breastfeeding women who need our assistance as well.

Our operation in DPR Korea is another grim example of funding shortfalls. The PRRO that started this year is not even 10 percent funded, so rations are kept at a minimum for many of the young children in nurseries and orphanages and pregnant or nursing mothers receiving supplementary food. Other beneficiary groups, such as school children, have been gradually cut off from assistance.

I'm sorry to say the situation is equally severe for the Country Programmes. Out of the 7 Country Programmes in the region, 6 of them have funding shortfalls of above 50 percent. Take Bangladesh, Nepal, or Indonesia; all of them are struggling to mobilize resources. As a result, our programmes have to be reduced, or activities suspended. This does not only affect the people we are serving in the short-term, but could also raise issues of sustainability or reliability with our Government counterparts in the longer-term.

The positive side of resourcing in Asia is that host Government is increasingly contributing to WFP programmes. Just one significant example of this in 2013 is Pakistan where the Government has committed 150,000 mt of wheat valued at US\$ 52 million. We cannot register all yet as we need to secure twinning funds from external donors. I believe such generous contribution from the government signifies both the seriousness of the government in tackling food and nutrition insecurity, as well as recognition of important work and partnership WFP offers.

I thank both the host governments and the donors for your continued support to WFP in Asia.