

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In my presentation, I would like to give two examples of how effective partnerships have been used in West Africa to reduce levels of acute under-nutrition and to voluntarily repatriate Liberian refugees. Both examples have corporate-wide application.

1. Partnership for Tackling Undernutrition in Northern Sahel Countries

The Niger crisis of 2005 was an eye-opener on how chronic poverty, accentuated by desertification and a high population growth rate, can accelerate the vulnerability of a population already living on the edge. Consequently, UNICEF and WFP, concerned about the gravity of widespread food insecurity and other health related problems prevailing in Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania immediately conducted nutritional surveys and food security analysis. The results are mind boggling.

- Infant and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world;
- Acute malnutrition rates for children under 5 years of age borders on, and in some cases is above the critical 15% threshold, ALL OF THE TIME and affects mostly very young children (between 0-24 months of age);
- Chronic malnutrition rates for children under 5 years of age exceed 30 percent;
- Most households are food insecure for 8-9 months of the year.

The following causal factors for these findings were identified:

- lack of access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities;
- lack of access to adequate health facilities;
- lack of a diversified nutritious diet;
- absence of age-appropriate weaning foods;
- inappropriate care practices, linked to low education level of mothers and cultural practices with regard to child care.

It has thus become clear that “**business as usual**” attitudes are no longer options.

A concerted sustained multi-disciplinary approach is needed. WFP, with your support, is ready to make its contribution.

Therefore in February 2006, OCHA, UNICEF and WFP developed a game plan on how to mount a frontal attack on malnutrition. We have taken on a **leadership and advocacy** role, and are working with Governments and technical and financial partners to develop a common understanding of the problems and prioritize response strategies into an urgent and sustained response.

We have provided **technical support** to Governments for the development of national protocols, worked with governments and partners to provide **up-to-date information and data on nutrition, child survival and food security**, fostered **interagency coordination** among UN-agencies and strengthened **partnerships** with governments, UN agencies, and NGOs. Key partners have been mobilized to give a **higher priority to nutrition** on both the development and humanitarian response agenda.

Interagency coordination and partnerships facilitated the rapid scaling-up in the delivery of **two essential packages for Nutrition and Child Survival**. UNICEF reinforced therapeutic feeding programmes and the delivery of key preventive interventions for child feeding, nutrition and survival; WFP expanded targeted and blanket supplementary feeding, food security and safety net interventions for children and their households.

In Niger we have demonstrated that the efforts of our partnership have significantly impacted on malnutrition. In 2005, 700,000 children were admitted to 900 facility-based and community-based feeding programs. The results were striking:

- The under 5 mortality rate reduced by a third within one year from 170 to 108 deaths per 1000 live births.
- The rate of acute malnutrition fell from 15.3% in 2005 to 10.3% in 2006. The statistics suggest that over 100,000 children, who would otherwise have been malnourished, are in good health.

The packages used to attain these results are low cost, replicable and have high impact.

CERF funding in 2006 made a substantial contribution to these efforts in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. Local procurement possibilities were also exploited to the maximum. About 30,000 MT of assorted food commodities were purchased in Mali and Burkina Faso. This creates a huge market for small holders, stimulates local economies, and gives our beneficiaries the types of commodities they are accustomed to eating and enables us purchase more with available funds.

We realize that these gains are vulnerable and can quickly atrophy if the underlying risk factors are not comprehensively addressed in a sustained manner. In this regard, UNICEF, WFP and OCHA invited Resident Coordinators, FAO Representatives, WHO Representatives, USAID, ECHO, ADB, WB and representatives of concerned governments to a meeting in Dakar in February of this year to develop multidisciplinary plan for combating child undernutrition in the Sahel. We also committed ourselves to convincing member states to assume the driver's seat in this battle and to systematically incorporate undernutrition issues in the PRSPs and UNDAFs.

In order to sustain reductions in under nutrition in the medium term, it is necessary that agricultural production be increased and diversified. WFP Food for Work projects provide numerous examples of how people, using simple techniques and technologies, can halt and reverse environmental degradation, increase food production and cope with climatic shocks as already articulated by my colleague from ODK.

In this vein, FAO, IFAD and WFP have committed themselves to assisting governments of concerned countries as they prepare and implement environment friendly integrated rural development projects. In Ghana, the foundation for expanding this type of cooperation in other countries has been laid.

WFP and UNICEF have demonstrated that child undernutrition is not intractable. Low cost and high impact results can be obtained through effective partnerships. Child undernutrition can be prevented and mitigated and children in poor countries do not have to lead abbreviated lives.

I now wish to direct my attention to the very positive developments in Liberia and surrounding countries.

Liberia, with the support of the international community, created stable and safe conditions in the country which allowed for the successful 2005 elections. With the creation of the enabling environment, it became possible for Governments of surrounding countries, along with OCHA, UNHCR and WFP, to facilitate the orderly return of refugees and internally displaced persons.

In 2004 there were hundreds of thousands of refugees and IDPs in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, today there are less than twenty thousand Liberian refugees remaining out of the country.

In May 2006, OCHA, HCR and WFP met in Sierra Leone and developed a strategy and action plan that foresaw voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees by June 2007.

In February of this year OCHA, HCR and WFP met to review the strategy and implementation of the action plan and determined that the repatriation and resettlement operation was on track. We are proud of the success that this joint planning and collaboration with our sister UN Agencies had in assisting governments reintegrate their citizens into peaceful civil activities. Considerable thought and effort were given to putting in place incentives (the famous “pull factor”) to attract and to encourage people to return to their homes. I am pleased to advise that the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees was successfully completed, on schedule, at the end of June this year.

Mrs. Kamara, the Regional Director of UNHCR for Africa, and I agree that the collaboration between our agencies in this operation has been exemplary. We both feel that this model could be transferred to other prolonged refugee situations, elsewhere.

The Liberians are now at home, rebuilding their lives and their nation, and all of the international community can look on with pride; we all contributed to creating the conditions for this to happen.

This is the end of a big chapter, but the story is not over yet.

We all hope that Liberia will continue to progress in a peaceful and stable way. The new Government is using its limited means to rebuild society, put its children in school. The returnees are anxiously awaiting the “peace dividend” and will continue assistance to anchor them in their communities of return and rebuild physical and social infrastructure.

One of the crucial and critical needs in Liberia TODAY is the creation of an enabling environment for basic education to flourish. The new President of Liberia considers school feeding to be her **priority of priorities**. A generation of children has lost out already. Child combatants need to be enrolled in school.

WFP’s school feeding operation provides the best meal most of those Liberian children have in a day. Apart from attracting and retaining them in school, it substantially improves their rates of attention and comprehension. WFP, UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO, and FAO are

working in partnership to assist the Government of Liberia rehabilitate the educational system in the country. I was in Liberia three weeks ago and had extensive discussions with key stakeholders and visited some of the schools.

The need for school feeding to underpin the post-war recovery efforts in Liberia has been underscored several times.

The school system must be developed **TODAY and not TOMORROW.**

This is a successful repatriation and resettlement story and the lesson here is that repatriation of refugees and return of internally displaced persons can be quickly attained through effective partnership with HCR and others when linked with strengthening appropriate relief/recovery activities. Such a link cannot be sustainably developed without sustained donor support.

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the donor community for their generous support to WFP's efforts in West Africa. Thank you, Mr. President.