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REPORT OF THE WFP EXECUTIVE BOARD BUREAU MEMBERS ON THEIR VISIT TO SUDAN

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Bureau of WFP's Executive Board undertook a one week visit to Sudan from 28 April to 4 May. This was intended to familiarize the Bureau with WFP's largest programme, to observe operations on the ground, and to have an opportunity for direct interaction with WFP field staff. The timing was considered opportune following discussion of the Darfur evaluation at the most recent session of the Board. The possibility of observing WFP's role as part of the United Nations country team was also of interest, especially given ongoing discussions regarding potential improvements to United Nations system performance at country level.

Context

2. Sudan has experienced good macroeconomic performance in recent years. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates are now approaching double digit levels, and GDP per capita (PPP) is just under \$2,000. The oil sector is growing, and recent cereal harvests have been in excess of national consumption requirements.
3. There have been problems of internal conflict, although a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has improved this situation. The Darfur region remains an area of insecurity and humanitarian need.

VISITS

4. The Mission Visited:
 - El Fasher and Kutum in North Darfur (mother-and-child health (MCH) clinic, internally displaced persons (IDPs) camp, field office).
 - Geneina and Mornie in West Darfur (IDP camp including supplementary feeding centre, meeting with Governor and National Welfare Agency representatives, African Union Mission sector commander, regional office briefings).
 - Rumbek (regional office briefings, meeting with State Governor and Education Minister, visits to food for work (FFW), food for education (FFE) projects).
 - Khartoum for briefings from the country office and United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator.

The Mission travelled by the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS). Its members were graciously accommodated in guest quarters in WFP residential compounds during the visits outside Khartoum.

OBSERVATIONS

Darfur

5. WFP has mounted a large scale food relief operation from a very small base, which appears to reach the great majority of the vulnerable population. It has done so in sometimes adverse circumstances, using innovative approaches to logistics and other



challenges. Office and living arrangements appear functional and well organized. The mission was impressed with the professionalism of all the staff met. WFP appears to have a level of resourcing, coverage and scale of operation that goes well beyond those of other actors in Darfur, and results in what might be described as “deep field presence”. Other agencies piggyback on this presence, and their personnel often use WFP facilities as a meeting place. Partly for these reasons the coordination and spirit of cooperation among United Nations organizations and with cooperating non-governmental organizations (NGOs) appears excellent. The UNHAS also greatly facilitates the operations of other humanitarian actors.

6. Notwithstanding these accomplishments in bringing relief to vulnerable people in Darfur, there remains a great challenge with respect to humanitarian access. This was reported by all actors. Due to ongoing security concerns, NGOs have significantly reduced their operations in rural areas, as have United Nations organizations. During the Mission’s visit two United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) vehicles were hijacked in the sector being visited, and although the occupants were subsequently released the vehicles had not been recovered and operations outside major centres were severely restricted. There have been a series of such incidents, even in sectors where there are no outright hostilities between opposing groups. The mission felt that this deterioration in access was an issue of the gravest concern for humanitarian operations in Darfur.
7. Similar security concerns, of an even graver nature were raised during a visit to Mornie IDP camp, home to some 73,000 displaced individuals. On the day of arrival 9 women had been missing for 24 hours following a trip out of the camp to collect firewood. Another group of women had set out to find them, but had been counselled by the nearby African Union Mission (AMIS) commander to exercise caution. Residents expressed to us directly their great preoccupation with this situation, which by all reports is one of longstanding and frequent occurrence. (In fact this issue had also been referred to in the recent evaluation of WFP’s Darfur operation.) This, along with the scarcity of firewood and associated environmental concerns, led the Mission to speculate on a possible role for WFP in facilitating cooking fuel provision, in part through accelerated provision of fuel efficient stoves, and perhaps even by provision of fuel itself in some form. Mission members were in no position to ascertain the feasibility of such suggestions, but would be interested in an assessment from staff.
8. The Mission received valuable insights from its meetings with AMIS officers. The latter spoke of their close cooperation with WFP and respect for its efforts, just as the WFP staff expressed their great appreciation for the role AMIS played when on request they provided escort and other support to food relief operations. Mission members could not help but be impressed with the sincere commitment AMIS officers expressed to us about their mission, nor could we help noting the frustration that they experienced due to funding constraints and the restrictions on their mandate.



9. Bureau members were impressed with the efforts that had been put into annual inter-agency Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessments (EFSNAs) – with up to 41 agencies participating. They appear to provide good analysis of the nutritional status of target populations, underlying causes, and beneficiaries’ own priorities. Interestingly, factors other than food access are often found to be of highest concern. Security, water and sanitation, and child feeding practices figure among these. The EFSNAs, conducted since 2005, do illustrate the exceptional achievement of humanitarian efforts in more than halving malnutrition rates in Darfur. Severe acute malnutrition is now under 1 percent, well below the generally accepted emergency level. The fact that the food basket had been tailored to local demand, with for instance the addition of sugar and salt, was noted.
10. The Mission noted the progress that has been made in targeting, registering, and delivering food relief since the onset of the Darfur crisis. It also noted that due to access constraints up to 20 percent of deliveries in rural areas are provided directly to communities, with cooperating agencies not able to play their usual distribution and monitoring role. In an operation of this scale, any opportunity to minimize inclusion error will bring significant economies, and the Mission discussed with staff what opportunities might be available in this regard, including biometric identification and continued careful checking of beneficiary credentials.
11. The high costs of transporting commodities to Darfur was noted, and the Mission wondered if there were organization wide benchmarks for landside transport, storage and handling (LTSH) to which these costs could be compared.
12. In light of the fact that WFP is now in its third year of food relief operations in Darfur, and notwithstanding the continuing difficult security situation and uncertainty of future peace, the Mission felt it was not too early to begin thinking of what conditions and preparations might be necessary for a transition/recovery/phase-out scenario.
13. The Mission took the opportunity to discuss with field staff the evaluation of WFP’s Darfur operations which had been presented at the First Regular session of the Executive Board in February of this year. It was viewed as a useful learning exercise, which had prompted staff to reflect on what they viewed as the three phases of WFP operations to date:
 - the “quantity” phase in which there was an urgent need to set up operations and deliver sufficient food to prevent widespread starvation (2005);
 - the “quality” phase in which needs assessment, targeting, and other facets of the operation were improved (2006);
 - the “analysis” phase in which greater attention to strategic issues and future directions is being undertaken (2007).

South Sudan

14. As a result of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), recovery efforts have commenced in South Sudan. The Mission travelled to Rumbek, the longstanding base of WFP operations (although now moved to Juba), received briefings, and visited a number of Food for Work and Food for Education sites. It also met with the State Government, and some United Nations Agency and NGO representatives.
15. It appears that to date numbers of returnees are far below those forecast in WFP’s 2007 emergency operation (EMOP). Only 30,000 of a forecast 450,000 have been registered so far, although this may be due in part to difficulties in counting “spontaneous” returns which do not go through the registration process.



16. There is currently very limited capacity on the ground – in either the government, other relevant United Nations agencies, or voluntary organizations – to support the recovery process. At the same time there is an urgent need to encourage the incipient organizational and development efforts of communities and returnees emerging from the long period of conflict. WFP’s FFW and FFE projects are intended to do this. The Mission observed commendable enthusiasm and effort on the part of communities and cooperating partners at the projects we visited.
17. There were however some shortcomings from the point of view of technical merit and sustainability that the Mission felt needed to be addressed. Among FFW activities, an agriculture training centre being constructed by a local cooperative with FAO guidance was in a remote location without immediate prospects of water or power, also prompting the question of whether direct extension in farm communities might not be a better approach. At school construction sites it was not clear that the necessary recurrent expenditures for teachers and materials would be forthcoming. A FFE site visited did not exhibit the basic hand-washing and sanitary facilities that should be expected as part of the “essential package” in such situations.
18. Again, the Mission understood the capacity constraints that exist in this situation, and were positively impressed in our meetings with local government officials at their sincerity and commitment in overcoming capacity constraints. It will be important that they eventually take on the counterpart commitment for the small-scale activities that WFP is initiating.
19. We were impressed with WFP’s vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) efforts, and ability to reach into rural areas throughout South Sudan in order to cater for returnees and reconstructing communities. It does not appear that other United Nations agencies have nearly this level of on the ground capacity.

Khartoum

20. The Mission had a series of exceptionally informative briefings from programming, nutrition, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff of WFP, as well as the Country Director Mr Kenro Oshidari, Darfur Coordinator Mr Carlos Veloso, and the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr Mauel Aranda da Silva. It was particularly gratified with the insights provided by Mr da Silva, which addressed many of the questions about the peace process and role of the United Nations system which had occurred to Mission members during the mission. There certainly appeared no reason to doubt his assertions that WFP is a constructive and engaged player in the United Nations country team. We also noted with interest the pilot experience of the Common Humanitarian Fund for Sudan to date.

WFP – FAO COOPERATION

21. The Mission was interested to observe the level of cooperation between FAO and WFP. This included joint participation in EFSNAs and crop and food security assessment missions (CFSAMs), as well as at least two FFW initiatives – one for tree-planting in Darfur and one for farmer training in South Sudan.



CONCLUSIONS

22. Deteriorating security conditions in Darfur are restricting humanitarian access to an alarming degree. All parties must be encouraged to address this problem, and to allow relief delivery to deserving communities and individuals without restriction.
23. WFP has mounted an impressive humanitarian operation in Darfur. This accomplishment is a credit to its staff, particularly the logistics and delivery backbone of the organization. Malnutrition has been drastically reduced, and conditions in the camps appear good. Despite continuing uncertainty, some consideration should now be given to the future. What conditions are necessary for camp inhabitants to eventually return to their livelihoods, what role might WFP play in this process, and what are the prospects and timeframe for eventual phase-out?
24. WFP's "deep field presence", knowledge of the location and situation of vulnerable populations, and method of operation through cooperating partners and community food relief committees, position it well to be a central player in "early recovery" efforts. To play such a role however, it must have appropriately qualified field staff in place, and work in partnership with the United Nations and voluntary agencies that will have a longer term development role.
25. WFP is an appreciated team player in the United Nations country team in Sudan, as reported by the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, other United Nations Agencies, and voluntary organizations.

ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

AMIS	African Union Mission
CFSAM	crop and food security assessment mission
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
EFSNA	Emergency Food Security and Nutrition Assessment
EMOP	emergency operation
FFE	food for education
FFW	food for work
GDP	gross domestic product
IDP	internally displaced person
LTSH	landside transport, storage and handling
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MCH	mother-and-child health
NGO	non-governmental organization
PPP	GDP per capita
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAM	vulnerability analysis and mapping