

2019 second regular session of the Executive Board

Opening remarks of the Executive Director

D. Beasley, Executive Director: Mr President, thank you very much and we have a lot of work to do. Until there is no one going to bed hungry in the world, we will not rest. I was going to go over the agenda for this week but you have done that so well, I will skip that part. But you have made a couple of comments on what we are all about and that is helping people. We are a family, the whole world is a family of brothers and sisters and this great teaching that transcends all religions and all cultures is to love your neighbour as yourself. That is what we at WFP are all about.

How do we make certain that all of our family members around the world have the same opportunities that we have – that they do not go to bed hungry? How can we achieve zero hunger, which is our fundamental obligation and mandate here at the World Food Programme? To do that we have been working hard, but we cannot be the best of the best and achieve all that we can achieve unless we also adapt and make certain that we meet the challenges in our own operations.

You and I understand clearly that in WFP we do not have any tolerance for abuse of authority or harassment in any shape, fashion or form, and I have been sounding that message since I joined WFP two and a half years ago. But I have heard people say that you cannot change the culture of the United Nations. Well, I will say this very clearly: I do not accept the premise that UN culture cannot be changed, number one, and, number two, the World Food Programme is the best of the best. But just because we are the best of the best does not mean we cannot be better.

We are not perfect, we have our shortcomings but I can assure you, we are making headway and we will continue to drive the changes that are necessary so that the World Food Programme is a model for the United Nations system. We do not hide our problems in a closet. We expose them to the world because we believe that you help us be more accountable. You help us be better. I have seen that we are making progress just in the last couple of General Staff Surveys. Just a matter of years ago, 44 percent of the people were participating in the survey. But I have been driving the message, you have got to speak out, you have got to speak out. And in the last survey 88 percent of the people participated in the survey. And 83 percent said they believe that management is now driving better values and leadership. But at the same time, the survey also showcased that we have got a lot of work to do.

So the Joint Working Group is fantastic, there's been a lot of hard work with management and the Board coming together saying "how can we drive further change"? How do we ensure it is not just the Executive Director speaking about it, but truly driving change inside the organization at every level in every location?

You know, as well as I do, we are not just working with the Joint Working Group. We have been working on these issues in the past couple of years. Let me just reiterate a few things that we have done already in what I call phase one, as we prepare to go to phase two.

When I joined in 2017, we immediately began issuing robust policy changes on protection from harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority, power and discrimination; we scrapped the six-month time limit to report misconduct; we enabled anonymous reporting; we allowed witnesses to actually speak up and report; we developed and are rolling out a respect campaign now in more than 40 countries, providing expert guidance and advice on how to build a respectful workplace; and we are providing face-to-face behavioural standard sessions, to over 5,000 people by the end of this calendar year, to help employees identify and report abusive conduct.

We are also increasing investments in the Office of the Inspector General by USD 1.3 million per year, doubling the number of specifically and specially trained investigators to 22 and we are adding posts in Human Resources and Legal to assure accountability, while making certain that we have specialists in identifying these types of issues.

Finally, we are setting ambitious gender parity targets for the World Food Programme to drive progress across the organization. And, of course, I have been constantly – in every country I go to, every meeting I have – continuing to drive this message home.

We know it is not going to be easy. We know society does not adapt quickly on certain things. I do believe that the United Nations should be the model for the rest of the world and I do not care whether we are in some of the most difficult places on earth, that women may be oppressed or abuse of authority may be the common thing; we have to set the standard and we have got to do it internally because that, in my opinion, is what is going to change the day.



2019 second regular session of the Executive Board

And while we do that, we have to listen to our own employees at all levels of the organization, hear from them and understand what they are facing. When I look at the changes at the World Food Programme, I mean, this was an organization that in the year 2000 was only about USD 1.6 billion, in terms of expenditure.

We are now an almost USD 8 billion revenue operation. We have gone from 7,000 employees to now 18,000 employees and over 58 percent of them are short-term consultants, short-term contracts, and they feel very vulnerable, they feel they have no voice and it is a serious concern. We have gone from spending about USD 200,000 per employee to USD 450,000 per employee. We are a massive operation. We are no longer just a small family operation. We are a large family operation and I want to maintain that family spirit.

But how do we drive this agenda in such a way that we do not become so prescriptive that we lose our flexibility, which is what makes the World Food Programme the envy of the world. How are we able to achieve so much around the world? We cannot continue to be the best of the best unless you continue to hold us accountable and push us in the direction that we need to go.

Excellencies, just in the past year, there has been a USD 9 trillion increase in global wealth. USD 9 trillion – so now we have USD 361 trillion of fluid and available wealth in the world today. I say that as an indictment on humanity and all of us in this room because the hunger rate is going up. If we have that much wealth, how is it that the hunger rate is going up? Now 821 million people on any given day go to bed hungry. And then there are those people suffering acute hunger, in other words on the brink of starvation, over 113 million, and there is a further 142 million knocking on that door and when every five seconds a child dies of hunger, it is a shame on humanity.

When we have this much wealth, coupled with the expertise we have in this room, we should be able to achieve zero hunger. But what is standing in our way? Number one, is conflict. Zero hunger by 2030 is not possible unless we end the conflicts.

If we can end the conflicts, I have little doubt we can end hunger around the world, with the expertise and the proven experience that we have, showcased in some of the most difficult countries on earth. In fact, we would have famine in at least four or five countries, if it were not for the funding and the expertise we get from you that helps us in driving down humanitarian disasters in places like Yemen, the Syrian Arab Republic, South Sudan, Northeast Nigeria and Somalia.

If we were not there, thanks to your funds, we would have famine conditions in these places and more people would have been dying. But because of your support, because of your true belief in the World Food Programme, we are getting the job done.

But conflict is not our only problem. The climate is truly shifting in ways we have not understood nor seen in a long, long time. Now, we can debate what has caused it all day long, but you and I have to deal with the consequences of flash floods and more frequent hurricanes and tornadoes and droughts. We are not just about saving lives, we are also about changing lives. And that is one of the beautiful things about the World Food Programme because we understand that while we are facing complexities, we have solutions. And we will need them over the next few decades, because, for example, over 200 million people could be displaced due to the changing climate and land degradation.

We are struggling now with what we are facing, so imagine what we are going to be facing in the future. And this is why we have got to be more effectively prepared. That's why resilience is so important, and the humanitarian and the development dynamic coming together and providing greater resilience for these communities so they can survive until there are long-term solutions to the issues of the changing climate.

But try telling that to someone in the Niger or Somalia who is impacted by flash floods or droughts. You want them to sit back and wait until there is a solution on the Paris Agreement? No, we have got to work in the meantime to keep them alive and help them to be more resilient. Because if we do not address the humanitarian needs upfront, oh, my goodness, there won't be enough development dollars in the world to overcome the cost.

We have seen this in other places. We saw what happened in Syria when we did not address this conflict upfront. You have heard me speak about this before and I have spoken about it in Germany. Take a Syrian inside Syria, it costs us about 50 cents per person to assist a Syrian in Damascus. But if that Syrian ends up in Berlin, it costs between € 50 and € 100 per day to meet their humanitarian needs - and, quite frankly, that Syrian person would rather be in Syria.

The point is that, if we can come in and address the root causes of food insecurity, we can save substantial numbers of lives and billions of dollars. WFP is best positioned to do this based on our experience. Let me just



2019 second regular session of the Executive Board

give you some numbers on what we have been able to do over the past five years, in places with fragile governance, where we have conflict, and where we have climate extremes.

Just in the past five years, we have rehabilitated 1.4 million hectares of land with our food for asset programmes. We have built over 70,000 kilometres of roads. That is equivalent to 15 road trips from New York to Los Angeles. We have dug 44,000 irrigation ponds, wells and reservoirs. The number of miles, thousands of miles of canals. Over six billion trees have been planted over the decades of the life of the World Food Programme. You see, we are not in the talking business, we are in the getting it done business. That is the World Food Programme.

I have not met a beneficiary yet that says, hey, just give me food so I can sit around. Every single person I talk to wants to be self-sufficient. They do not want outside support. And so when we come in and help them rehabilitate their land so that they do not need our support later on, we are helping them be self-sufficient for the future.

Our resilience programmes have cut soil erosion; reduced desertification; helped absorb CO₂; conserved precious water; returned land to agricultural use; made families more viable and stronger livelihoods a reality. What's more, when we invest in prevention, we also free ourselves up to achieve even more with the funds we receive.

This is one of the questions I have had since I have been here, and I have asked United Nations colleagues this: You have been in some of these countries for 30 or 40 years and you are doing the same thing over and over and over. At some point you have to back up and say, what do we need to do differently? Sometimes it is just scaling up. Sometimes it is totally trashing a programme that is not getting it done. But at the World Food Programme we are getting it done. The integrated approach to humanitarian and development requires us to be more strategic than we ever have before, because when we get it right, the results are truly inspiring.

Children able to go to school, young men and women able to find jobs, land is rehabilitated, climate change resilience is increased, conflict goes down, migration goes down, particularly migration by necessity, teen pregnancy rates go down, child marriage rates goes down, recruitment by extremist groups goes down. You can economically quantify the benefits of addressing the root causes of hunger, as we so strategically and effectively do, compared to the extraordinary cost of failing to act in time.

This brings us to geographical areas of concern that we cannot neglect. We talked about the Sahel region in the List meetings. I want to touch upon this because we have just declared a Level Three emergency in Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso.

I remember two years ago as I was pounding this issue about the Sahel as a problem and several commentators around Europe were saying, we do not think the Executive Director knows what he is talking about. They just did not see a problem in the Sahel but, as I told a group of European and US leaders at a conference not too long ago: "If I fed your family every day for two years and your village and your neighbourhood, do you think I would know what is going on and what is probably going to happen in the near future?" You bet I would.

You see, we are out there in the field. We are not in New York just talking about lofty goals. We are on the front line, putting our lives at stake, laying down our lives for our brothers and sisters because we believe that they have just as much right to food and life as we have. But the Sahel is in danger and it cannot be neglected any further. It is going to require each and every one of us to step up our game, otherwise we are going to face significant and serious consequences. If we do not invest in tackling the root causes of poverty and hunger, extremism will take over, which will cause further destabilization and migration by necessity.

From November of 2018 to March of 2019, in Mali, the Niger and Burkina Faso, there were 4,776 fatalities. That is up almost 50 percent on the same period the year before. Almost 50 percent – 2,100 – of the people killed were civilians.

Nearly 2,000 schools are closed or are non-operational because of the growing conflict and instability. Half a million people have been displaced. It is not getting any better and I can assure you, the trend is only going to get substantially worse and this is the agenda of the extremist groups: to destabilize for their own purposes, to bring havoc on the global economy and people around the world.

Against this backdrop, we urgently need serious efforts to resolve conflict and build peace, and these must include community livelihood and resilience programmes. That is why at WFP, we have launched the Framework for Resilience in the Sahel. From now until 2023 we have a strategic plan, a strategic programme that, if successfully scaled up and funded, we believe that will do more to impact society positively than anything else.



2019 second regular session of the Executive Board

Because, quite frankly, if you do not have food security, you will not have any other kind of security, and that is why the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution last year explicitly acknowledging this reality: that food security is critical for the future stability of the world. We need for you to help step up the game of addressing and getting more funding for these programmes in your countries, because failure to do so is going to reap havoc and the costs and consequences could be a thousand times more expensive later if we do not.

In Syria, the needs are still substantial. Recent events I think have us all concerned. Just before the recent events we were supporting 3.5 million people. Of course, we were doing a lot more than that a few years ago but things have stabilized. Recently now, though, we have bumped back up to 4.3 million. We have revamped our activities in response to the current conditions, including the growing needs in the Northeast.

Let me give you a few numbers. By early November, at least 215,000 people were internally displaced, over 14,000 had fled into Northern Iraq, over the border. We have so far reached about 485,000 people in Al-Hasakah as well as in Raqqa Governorate with emergency food aid.

Northwestern Syria has been relatively calm but we have been able to reach the people we need to reach there, although we have got a lot more work to do. We have been able to double the number of beneficiaries we are reaching and access there is really pretty good. Better access has also given us the opportunity to expand our monitoring in areas that have previously been very tough.

In Yemen, meanwhile, needs are urgent and immense. We have got 20 million people who are food-insecure. 10 million are severely food-insecure. 2 million children under five suffer from acute malnutrition. 360,000 children are at risk of dying without urgent treatment. And then the bottom line: we have the greatest presence across the entire country, but if we were not on the ground in Yemen like we are, there would be famine, in my opinion. So I thank you, the donors, for stepping up, many of you in this room, we are so appreciative of all you have done.

Because of your generosity we have been able to reach about 12.2 million people in Yemen. We provide a mix of cash, vouchers, commodities, etc., and we also have been able to reach 605,000 children in 1,500 schools. This is critical to Yemen's future because we're talking about a generation that would be completely lost but for the programmes that we are implementing.

We are not satisfied that we are doing enough, but getting access is something we have been working on very diligently, as you know. We have had some difficult issues inside Yemen, as you know, in the past few months, when we began a suspension because of the blatant abuse of the humanitarian principles that we stand by.

Now, it would have been easier for us to just cow down and do not do anything, but the World Food Programme is not going to sit idly by in any situation where people are dying because of the lack of access. We had a moral obligation to stand for the humanitarian principles of the United Nations. And it was a tough period. I can tell you.

But we stood strong and many of you in this room went into bat for us and thanks to the pressure that was brought to bear, we were able to reach a resolution with the Ansar Allah elements as well as with the Houthis and we have made a lot of progress. But it has not been easy and it still is not easy. In fact, the NAMCHA – the humanitarian operating group inside that part of Yemen – has just reconstituted a new committee and they have brought in more hard-line elements. We do not expect that to be a favourable development.

However, so far, the pressure we have been bringing to bear from a lot of different sources has yielded results. And so since the August agreement, we have worked to finalize the details of the registration programme, starting the pilot programme inside Sana'a. We are one month behind the original timeframe but we are making progress. WFP has the necessary equipment and other resources ready. In fact, the equipment arrived yesterday - that was a great, great breakthrough.

We are now hoping to move forward with regard to registration and biometrics, with Sana'a being the first area inside the Ansar Allah-controlled area of the country to see it introduced. In the coalition-controlled areas of Yemen we have registered 729,000 people already of the planned 2.8 million with digitalization and biometrics. So you know that every single dime is going to the intended beneficiaries and not being diverted.

We know, and your taxpayers will know, the food, the cash, the vouchers, whatever it may be, is going to the intended beneficiaries and not being diverted for other purposes. Inside the Ansar Allah-controlled areas, we plan to register 1.3 million families biometrically, that is about 9 million people, and, as I mentioned just a minute ago, we will start that first and foremost in Sana'a where we introduced the suspension just a few months ago.

The food crisis inside Yemen is tragic. And you have seen the depreciation or the inflation rate with the Rial. So, if we can come in with a cash-based transfer system, we can stimulate the economy, which will take the



2019 second regular session of the Executive Board

inflationary rate, the value of the Rial down such that another 17 million people can afford to buy bread and basic food supplies. So, we are hoping, with this modality, we can impact not just the 12.2 million we are reaching but also the other 17 million people in Yemen that need our help.

Let me also just give a brief update on Venezuela. We talked about it at the List meetings. We have formally presented the results of the food security assessments to the Venezuelan authorities. We are negotiating now the possibility of establishing a presence in such a way that we can make an impact inside Venezuela, but we have been very clear with all parties involved that we will be strictly focusing on independent and neutral humanitarian assistance. We will be working along these lines and we are doing so as we speak.

Sudan and South Sudan, I do not want to get into every country around the world because we would be here for a few more days, but a lot of progress is being made in the Sudan. I talked about this at the List meeting last week, the extraordinary progress that we have been able to make in terms of breaking down barriers and gaining access that have not been broken down in eight to ten years. And so we are hopeful there.

These are just a few updates. Let me say that, when you go through all the 80 some odd countries that we are in – and I said this when I got here two and a half years ago – that we can only do so much with the money and the people we have. And if all the trucks are out because of the fires, we do not have any more fire trucks if a new fire happens. We have now got 18 Level Three and Level Two emergencies, the highest number ever. But yet we are able to reach more people and do more than in any time period before because of the commitment and dedication of the people that we have. But we have got a lot more work to do. We are going to need more funding.

And on the funding side, I do not think any United Nations agency's funding is growing more strongly than the World Food Programme's. From USD 5.9 billion just two and a half years ago, now we are pretty close to hitting USD 8 billion this calendar year. Our projection right now for this year is USD 7.75 billion but quite frankly this is a conservative estimate and it could very well hit 8 billion.

This year I predict that the funding from the United States will reach 3 billion dollars. Now I do not say that to brag, I say that to help give you some assurance that the United States is continuing to stay strong in its support for WFP. I have taken advantage of every personal relationship on Capitol Hill, in the White House, among the Republicans and Democrats, and they are united on the World Food Programme and international aid. They may not be united on anything else, but God have mercy, thank goodness they are united on that.

Having said that, many of you in this room - and looking around this table, from Germany, the United Kingdom, from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries - many of you have been stepping up too. But we cannot step back because the needs are greater than we can imagine. We have quantified a gap of USD 3 billion but, quite frankly, I think that gap is not representative or reflective of the true shortfall that exists.

We have got to do more to make the case and this is why you clearly understand that WFP is a humanitarian and a development organization, as I said the other day. In fact, when you go back to our original mandate dating from when WFP was set up, we were given three tasks. One: to use food and aid to support economic and social development; two, to meet refugee and other emergency and protracted relief food needs; and, three, to promote world food security.

And with all the fire trucks out at the emergencies that we have been dealing with, well guess what? We have not been able to focus on all three, because our structure was based upon a model from fifty years ago and we have neglected the humanitarian–development nexus. And it is a serious issue for us because in my opinion, we are looking at serious concerns for 2020 with expected reductions of 35 to 50 percent in certain non-emergency and development-focused areas. And if you neglect the root causes of hunger, if you neglect the resilience issues, you are going to pay for it a hundred-fold.

This is what is at stake. This is the argument I make when I go to Germany, the United States, or the United Kingdom and talk to some of the conservatives who ask, well, “why should I send money to the Niger, or Chad, or Burkina Faso when my taxpayers are worried about the schools, and the bridges and the roads in their home areas?”. But I explain the reality: that we are just not another agency throwing out money, that we truly will save them money with effective programmes that help people become more resilient and self-reliant. That is the power of the World Food Programme.

But we still have this funding gap and I do not think it is realistic to think that we are going to be able to call upon governments to step up and double the money. I just do not see the reality of that politically. This is why we have been working so hard with you on the Private Sector Partnerships and Funding Strategy.



2019 second regular session of the Executive Board

This strategy will help us in so many ways, because I do not believe we will ever solve hunger around the world, or poverty around the world, until the private sector is fully engaged. And I am not just talking about philanthropy, although that is very important. Private sector engagement is also going to be critical to create the fundamental building blocks of sustainable development, country by country, to finally end poverty. It is obvious if you look around the world that the nations that have been successful have invested clearly in the private sector.

I have no doubt in my mind that with USD 361 trillion of wealth in the world that we can tap into that in a very serious way. And those funds will have the greatest amount of flexibility. Your support just last year, when you gave us USD 1.2 million to focus on ShareTheMeal. We have already got a return on that of over USD 12 million. That is a pretty good investment. I would love to give a million dollars to my investment broker and within a year and a half he or she gives me back gives me back 12 million dollars.

We need to scale that up. Because when I see all the millennials around the world I do believe that they would love to participate in ending hunger just by using their cell phone. So we are going to use this device to help unite society because the World Food Programme we are about using food as a weapon of peace and unity not division.

Many private sector companies are also working with us on our plans for digitization. When I arrived I was quite frankly disappointed at the United Nations' failure to embrace the digital world. But I found that the World Food Programme was ahead of many other agencies. Since then, we have skyrocketed our commitment. Now we have over 44 million identities on our SCOPE system in over 61 countries. This digitalization programme, along with increasing use of biometrics, gives donors assurance regarding the integrity of our systems of operation.

Just look at what we have done in relation to cash-based transfers. Just a few years ago we were at just four or five hundred million dollars. Now we are at 2 billion dollars and it is having a major impact on local economies in countries around the world.

This digital leadership is recognized by WFP's IT Advisory Board, which brings the CIO-level executives from top companies around the world like Shell, Amazon and Gartner, just to name just a few. At our meeting last week, they recognized that we are first for digital transformation within the United Nations. Their assessment highlights the morale and passion shown by WFP employees. And they also acknowledge the work that we have done to improve cybersecurity.

We have made enhancements to the SCOPE programme to match personal data when the system is used by our partners. We are going to protect data. We have recruited a data protection officer and recruited and created a responsible data task force. Your confidence in this system is critical, it is essential as we go forward. And we know we cannot be vulnerable. We have got to have our walls of security up and that is why we are the best and the biggest at protecting data, in blockchain technologies and many other things. We are pioneers. We will continue to push forward because we know the savings that can be achieved, and the efficiencies and effectiveness delivered with these types of systems.

Elsewhere, we have made a lot of progress on addressing outstanding audit recommendations. We have closed 103 recommendations since July, 80 percent more than the year before. Of the 103 audit recommendations closed since July, 82 are from the 153 overdue recommendations and 21 have been closed ahead of schedule. We have a further 71 overdue recommendations but we are on top of it, and we will get it done. Some of them are not so simple – as Manoj just reminded me – but his team and the leadership group is truly focused on it. Keep the pressure on us while we do our day job. That is very important.

Next year we will also run a bottom-up strategic budgetary exercise on the programme support administrative budget, so that every headquarters' unit and regional bureau will have to analyse and explain all of its budgetary expenses.

One thing I love about WFP which I do not necessarily see in all organizations around the world, is the focus on driving out waste and inefficiencies. Our people know if they can save a dollar that pays for four meals for children. So, they are always looking for ways to save money. But sometimes headquarters gets a little bit out of touch with the field and we are going to work on that this coming year. We have got some wonderful people all over the world in the World Food Programme.

Turning briefly to the Management Plan, the 2020 PSA budget comprises about USD 423.4 million, which is up about 10 percent and includes USD 22.5 million for the Immediate Response Account. Quite frankly I would like to see the Immediate Response Account get a lot more. And I say that with fire because when we had the crisis in Mozambique, we could not afford to just wait five or six days to respond because we were waiting to



2019 second regular session of the Executive Board

get emergency funding. And we didn't have to - we were able to act quickly and save lives because we were on the ground in no time thanks to the financial strength and the flexibility that you have given us.

Now having said that, we have still got 30, 40 million dollars of Mozambique funding that has not been reimbursed. So, please do not leave us hanging. Please support us to strengthen our Immediate Response Account because that fire truck will make the difference to our ability to save lives. And I do not expect the year 2020 to have fewer fires. I do not expect there will be fewer hurricanes, fewer tornadoes, fewer earthquakes, fewer droughts. I do not see any of this changing and I do not think you do either.

And this is why we need to be financially viable, strong, the best of the best while our people around the world are in the best mindset possible. We will do what we need to do to strengthen our workplace culture and support our employees. We will do what we need to do to ensure all our employees are treated with respect. We will do what we need to do to make sure they have the best working environment possible. And with that I think you and I can truly achieve zero hunger by 2030, but we have got to end wars and you have got to continue to believe in us, hold us accountable, and give us the flexibility we need.

And so having said that Mr President, I will now turn it back over to you. Thank you very much.

