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Summary of the work of the 2020 annual session of the Executive Board

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## Draft summary of the work of the 2020 annual session of the Executive Board

### Table of contents

<b>Other business</b> .....	<b>3</b>
2020/EB.A/1 Proposed reorganization of WFP's senior leadership structure .....	3
<b>Current and future strategic issues</b> .....	<b>3</b>
2020/EB.A/2 Opening remarks by the Executive Director .....	3
<b>Virtual panel session</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>General statements</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Other business</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Oral update on WFP's response to COVID-19 .....	8
Update on WFP's implementation of United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/279 (repositioning the United Nations development system) .....	8
Oral update on the implications for WFP of the guidance on the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks and common country analyses .....	8
<b>Resource, financial and budgetary matters</b> .....	<b>11</b>
2020/EB.A/3 Utilization of the programme support and administrative equalization account reserve .....	11
<b>Administrative and managerial matters</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Address by staff representative bodies to the Board .....	12
<b>Other business</b> .....	<b>13</b>
2020/EB.A/4 Comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination .....	13
<b>Annual reports</b> .....	<b>16</b>
2020/EB.A/5 Annual report of the Ethics Office for 2019 .....	16
2020/EB.A/6 Annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2019 and management response .....	17
2020/EB.A/7 Annual performance report for 2019 .....	19
<b>Policy issues</b> .....	<b>20</b>
2020/EB.A/8 Mid-term review of the WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021) .....	20
<b>Resource, financial and budgetary matters</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>List D statement on oversight matters</b> .....	<b>22</b>
2020/EB.A/9 Annual report of the Inspector General and note by the Executive Director .....	22

2020/EB.A/10	Management review of significant risk and control issues, 2019 .....	23
2020/EB.A/11	Annual report of the Audit Committee .....	24
2020/EB.A/12	Audited annual accounts, 2019 .....	25
2020/EB.A/13	Report of the External Auditor on the real estate portfolio and management's response to the External Auditor's recommendations .....	26
2020/EB.A/14	Report of the External Auditor on air transport services and management's response to the External Auditor's recommendations.....	27
2020/EB.A/15	Report on the implementation of the External Auditor's recommendations.....	28
2020/EB.A/16	Replenishment of the special account for wellness programmes.....	28
2020/EB.A/17	Report on the utilization of WFP's advance financing mechanisms (1 January–31 December 2019) .....	28
<b>Policy issues .....</b>		<b>29</b>
2020/EB.A/18	Update on WFP's role in the collective humanitarian response .....	29
	Update on WFP's response to HIV and AIDS.....	30
<b>Administrative and managerial matters .....</b>		<b>31</b>
2020/EB.A/19	Appointment of one member to the Audit Committee.....	31
2020/EB.A/20	Reports by the Joint Inspection Unit relevant to the work of WFP.....	31
<b>Evaluation reports .....</b>		<b>31</b>
2020/EB.A/21	Annual evaluation report for 2019 and management response .....	31
2020/EB.A/22	Summary report on the evaluation of WFP's Gender Policy (2015–2020) and management response .....	33
2020/EB.A/23	Summary report on the strategic evaluation of funding WFP's work (2014–2019) and management response .....	34
2020/EB.A/24	Synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations (2011–2019) and management response .....	35
2020/EB.A/25	Implementation status of evaluation recommendations .....	36
<b>Operational matters.....</b>		<b>37</b>
	East Africa portfolio .....	37
2020/EB.A/26	Country strategic plans — Ethiopia (2020–2025).....	38
	West Africa portfolio .....	40
	Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia portfolio .....	41
	Southern Africa portfolio.....	42
	Latin America and the Caribbean portfolio .....	43
	Asia and the Pacific portfolio .....	44
	Oral report on the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Office for Project Services, UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and WFP .....	45
	Oral update on United Nations Humanitarian Air Service .....	46
	Oral update on preparations for the 2021 United Nations summit on food systems .....	47
<b>Summary of the work of the 2020 first regular session of the Executive Board.....</b>		<b>48</b>
2020/EB.A/27	Summary of the work of the 2020 first regular session of the Executive Board.....	48
<b>Verification of adopted decisions and recommendations.....</b>		<b>48</b>
<b>ANNEX.....</b>		<b>49</b>
	<b>List of participants .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Acronyms.....</b>		<b>69</b>

## **Other business**

### **2020/EB.A/1 Proposed reorganization of WFP's senior leadership structure**

1. The President recalled that a proposal by the Executive Director to reorganize aspects of WFP's senior leadership structure had been added to the agenda for the current session at the request of Board members during an informal consultation on 26 June. The proposal had also been discussed by the Executive Board Bureau and during the Executive Director's meetings with the regional Lists in preparation for the current session.
2. The Executive Director said that the growing demands placed on WFP leaders by the expansion of WFP's workload left them with little time to dedicate to staff well-being and workplace culture. The proposed changes would give the Senior Advisor for Workplace Culture overall responsibility for those important issues while leaving the Chief of Staff free to focus on the traditional role and responsibilities of his post.
3. Board members welcomed the proposed reorganization, noting that it had no financial implications and that the directors of the Ethics Office and the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services would continue to report directly to the Executive Director and suggesting that it provided the right direction for optimal organizational coherence. They commended the Executive Director for his transparent, membership-inclusive and participatory approach to proposing and implementing the reorganization. Emphasizing the importance of translating good intentions into visible results, members urged WFP leadership to take swift action on any emerging issues related to workplace culture and staff well-being and to monitor the implementation of such actions. Observing that it would take several years to achieve meaningful change in WFP's workplace culture, they requested an update on the results of the reorganization after two years of implementation and an evaluation after four years.
4. Upon adoption of the decision on the matter, the President reiterated appreciation for the membership-oriented and inclusive mind-set that WFP management had shown, citing it as a multilateral best practice, exemplary in the Rome-based agency context and beyond.

## **Current and future strategic issues**

### **2020/EB.A/2 Opening remarks by the Executive Director**

5. The Executive Director described WFP's role in the global response to the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the resulting health and socioeconomic crisis. Losses in household income and national gross domestic product were being compounded by transport shutdowns, border controls, movement restrictions and export bans that disrupted food systems and led to localized food shortages. An estimated 270 million people would fall into acute food insecurity by the end of 2020, doubling the estimate of 135 million people before the pandemic.
6. WFP planned to scale up its 83 operations, increasing the number of people reached from 100 million to 138 million and providing technical assistance to governments and partners around the world. This would require a total of USD 12.8 billion in funding for 2020, and WFP was appealing urgently for USD 4.9 billion for the next six months. Thanks to donors accelerating USD 1.9 billion in previously pledged contributions, WFP had been able to pre-position food and maintain core services for partners. In addition, USD 445 million from the Immediate Response Account had been disbursed to under-funded operations. Areas of particular concern included Yemen, where 20 million people were food-insecure and bureaucratic delays and restrictions on movement had forced WFP to reduce operations in northern areas controlled by the Houthis in late March. WFP was working with local authorities to overcome restrictions and complete the biometric registration of beneficiaries and a food security needs assessment.

7. As part of its contribution to the global pandemic response, over the previous three months WFP had scaled up its support for government social protection systems in 49 countries and switched from school meal provision to take-home rations for 6.2 million children in its school feeding programmes. Local procurement of food totalling USD 210 million and USD 524 million in cash-based transfers had injected cash into local economies, and WFP's digital payment system was serving 10 million beneficiaries.
8. WFP common services for the response included eight newly opened humanitarian response hubs for the distribution of equipment, supplies and staff; 375 passenger and cargo flights to 130 destinations, carrying 5,300 frontline workers and 25,000 cubic metres of humanitarian cargo; and field hospitals in Accra and Addis Ababa. WFP's air service had also transported life-saving medical treatment to seriously ill employees. Four WFP employees had lost their lives to COVID-19, which had infected a total of 130 employees so far. WFP needed USD 965 million to maintain its air service beyond July.
9. Turning to internal issues, the Executive Director reiterated WFP's commitment to improving workplace culture, eliminating all forms of discrimination and abuse and achieving gender parity at all levels. Progress had also been made in addressing risk and control issues with the establishment of the Enterprise Risk Management Division and the recruitment of additional auditors. Senior management had formulated an action plan for the completion of outstanding audit recommendations and the Office of the Chief of Staff was tracking progress in implementation. Of the 21 recommended actions arising from the recent "tone at the top" audit, four had been completed during the audit, six had been implemented and five would be ready for the Inspector General's review over the summer.
10. The Executive Director thanked the Board for its consistent support and called on Board members to continue to provide their inputs and feedback to help WFP to improve and save more lives.

### **Virtual panel session**

11. Following the Executive Director's remarks the President opened a virtual panel session, with four distinguished guest speakers, on the theme "working together to ensure coherent humanitarian development and peace efforts that meet and reduce the needs of the most vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic".
12. H.E. Mr Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management for the European Commission, said that the pandemic demonstrated the importance of working together at the humanitarian-development-peace triple nexus, combining short-term response in sectors such as health, water and sanitation with efforts to alleviate social and economic impacts and build resilience. He welcomed the first ever United Nations global humanitarian response plan (GHRP), which included WFP's global common services plan for facilitating the delivery of assistance in the face of travel restrictions and severe logistics constraints caused by the crisis.
13. As part of its response to the pandemic, in early April the European Union had launched a global response plan that mobilized all of the European Union's humanitarian, development and peace instruments. European Union institutions and member states had pledged more than EUR 36 billion to address the immediate and long-term consequences of the pandemic, providing a model for future "whole of European Union" responses to global challenges. The European Union sought to strengthen its strategic partnerships with WFP and other United Nations agencies, and the Commissioner called on WFP and other actors to pool their expertise and address the pandemic together according to their core strengths.
14. Her Excellency Ms Reem Ebrahim Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates, described the pandemic as a common threat to all the world's nations, communities and households, with particularly severe effects in vulnerable countries and communities already challenged by conflict and natural disaster. Without an adequate global response, a quarter of a billion people would be pushed to the brink of

starvation by the end of 2020, and humanitarian and development actors needed to unite in coordinated worldwide efforts to leave no one behind.

15. The United Arab Emirates' contribution to the global COVID-19 response included airlifting medical and other equipment and supplies for organizations in 70 countries. An air bridge operation launched with WFP in May was transporting health and humanitarian supplies around the world, including materials for WFP's field hospitals in Ghana and Ethiopia. In addition, personal protective equipment, food and medicines for 1 million healthcare workers had been dispatched from the WFP-led United Nations humanitarian response depot in Dubai.
16. The pandemic called for closer international collaboration in supporting the most vulnerable communities and individuals and strengthening economies, health systems and food systems with the aim of fostering societies that were resistant and resilient in the face of socioeconomic and other shocks.
17. Ms Susanna Moorehead, Chair of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC), welcomed WFP's commitment to working at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus as recommended by OECD-DAC, whose members provided more than 85 percent of WFP funding. The nexus approach called for strengthened collaboration among United Nations, multilateral and bilateral entities, better programming that took both short-term crisis response and long-term development into account and improved financing strategies for predictable multi-year funding.
18. WFP already operated within a nexus framework, recognizing that food security was crucial to conflict prevention and socioeconomic stability and that links between humanitarian response and long-term development were essential. It also needed to strengthen its conflict analysis capacity and work more closely with peace and other actors on resilience building.
19. The pandemic made work at the nexus more important than ever as countries prepared for steep rises in poverty and hunger while development and humanitarian financing declined as a result of the economic impact on donors. WFP and its humanitarian, development and peace partners needed to demonstrate to stakeholders in host and donor countries that they were maximizing the effectiveness and impact of their work and that the nexus approach enabled them to address the immediate health crisis while protecting economies, jobs and the most vulnerable people.
20. Mr Mark Lowcock, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, shared previous speakers' concerns about increasing rates of poverty, starvation, child mortality and gender-based violence, which were exacerbated by the pandemic and resulting collapse of immunization, education and other services. The world risked the return of famines of a severity unseen since the 1980s. WFP's food assistance was essential in saving lives not only from starvation but also from the infections to which hungry people with compromised immune systems were susceptible. He echoed the Executive Director's appeal for additional funding, particularly for WFP operations in Yemen and for its logistics and air transport services, on which humanitarian workers in many parts of the world depended.
21. He observed that while OECD countries had pledged to invest USD 9 trillion in protecting the global economy from the effects of the pandemic just 1 percent of that amount would be sufficient to protect the 700 million most vulnerable people in the world. About two thirds of the USD 90 billion required could come from international financial institutions and the remaining USD 30 billion from grants to humanitarian agencies. It seemed a comparatively small sum to prevent what could be the greatest global loss of life in living memory.
22. Thanking the panellists for their insights, Board members welcomed WFP's commitment to adhering to the OECD-DAC recommendation on working at the triple nexus, which was a priority for many member countries. The pandemic made international cooperation more

- essential than ever, and members urged WFP to strengthen its partnerships on joint needs analysis, approaches to targeting and exit strategies, taking advantage of the comparative advantages of each partner. Expressing their commitment to continuing to support WFP, they reinforced calls for financing from both humanitarian and development sources for WFP's pandemic response.
23. Members asked for additional information on the allocation of funds for the humanitarian response plan among the various United Nations agencies involved; actions to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on women and children; collaboration between multilateral and bilateral development agencies and international financial institutions; WFP's establishment of humanitarian response hubs; the benefits of and best practices from the triple nexus approach; and the USD 90 billion investment suggested by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.
  24. Mr Lenarčič said that the global COVID-19 response provided a good example of the nexus approach because it mobilized humanitarian, development and peace and security instruments and funding according to the needs in each country or community, while requiring coordinated action by United Nations agencies and other actors in the field.
  25. Agreeing that there were opportunities for improving collaboration, Ms Al Hashimy said that she had observed a strong desire to benefit humanity among humanitarian and development workers in the field. This sentiment could be leveraged in efforts to break down the "silos" in which many agencies operated. Best practice programmes from the United Nations system and international financial institutions could also help to foster a collaborative, multilateral approach to addressing global challenges.
  26. Ms Moorehead said that better collaboration on the ground was key to encouraging donors to scale up financing, while the United Nations' empowered resident coordinator system would provide them with a single United Nations plan on which to base funding decisions. The movement of staff between national governments and multilateral agencies facilitated collaboration and enhanced understanding of the value of working together to maximize results. The OECD-DAC planned to host a roundtable meeting on best practices for and lessons from work at the nexus.
  27. Mr Lowcock said that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) was meeting weekly during the COVID-19 crisis and that agencies were collaborating on the ground more effectively than usual, thanks in part to WFP's common services. The main challenge to the coordination of United Nations humanitarian and development work was a shortage of funding. The GHRP, which had been issued in May, sought USD 6.7 billion for the COVID-19 response, including USD 1 billion for the logistics element provided by WFP. The plan consisted of proposals from each agency, and donors selected which proposals to finance.
  28. Regarding funding for other WFP activities, Mr Lowcock urged donors to increase their contributions to programmes for women and girls; only 8 percent of the already low USD 400 million of programming for women and girls included in humanitarian and refugee response plans for 2020 was funded. Dramatically increased funding for the work of WFP and other agencies in Yemen was also needed to keep people alive while a peace deal was agreed. Regarding his proposal for raising USD 90 billion to support the world's most vulnerable people, Mr Lowcock said that while USD 60 billion could be generated from international financial institutions, it was difficult to make such resources available on affordable and sufficiently generous terms to the countries with the greatest humanitarian challenges.
  29. The Executive Director said that WFP located its logistics hubs strategically and where needs were greatest. Collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was growing, with WFP providing the financial capacity to scale up operations and FAO contributing its expertise in agriculture and food production. He expected that WFP's new leadership structure would facilitate WFP's capacity to work at the

nexus. Undertaking to maintain his fundraising efforts, he warned that the economic effects of the pandemic on donor countries were likely to create a funding environment for 2021 that was even more challenging than usual.

### **General statements**

30. Following the virtual panel session Board members made general statements on the matters for discussion at the current session.
31. Members applauded WFP staff for their commitment to serving poor and vulnerable people affected by a record number of Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies around the world and paid homage to the four staff members who had lost their lives to COVID-19. They commended the drive to diversify and optimize WFP's funding base.
32. WFP's response to the COVID-19 crisis demonstrated its ability to shift resources rapidly in an emergency, including by adapting activities such as school feeding to the effects of the pandemic. Members praised WFP's provision of common logistics services and focus on protecting food production and trade and ensuring functioning food systems. The crisis called for coordinated action and the pooling of funding and capacity among actors seeking to protect food supply chains and access to food assistance. Partnerships were essential and efforts should focus on geographical areas with limited health and social protection systems and on building public service delivery capacity and the resilience of people and communities. Many middle-income countries would also require support as the pandemic created gaps in public expenditure. Members recommended that best practices adopted during the pandemic be documented and shared with a view to improving future responses. Clear information on the countries and sectors most affected by gaps in funding for WFP's activities would assist governments and other donors in their decisions regarding resource allocation.
33. Moving on to other areas of WFP's work, members welcomed the development of new tools for the fight against hunger – including at the WFP Innovation Accelerator in Munich – and encouraged WFP to focus on the reduction of food losses. South-South and triangular cooperation, including through WFP's centres of excellence around the world, could play an important role in helping countries to achieve food security.
34. With the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating gender inequality and leading to increased gender-based violence in many countries, support for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls were more important than ever. Gender mainstreaming required adequate resourcing, strengthened staff capacity and a robust accountability framework. Members also called for the formulation of a disability inclusion roadmap, with a results and accountability framework that provided evidence of WFP's progress in meeting its commitments under the United Nations disability inclusion strategy.
35. Formulation of WFP's next strategic plan should be informed by the findings from the mid-term review of the current plan and take into account issues related to gender equality and the empowerment of women, protection, the needs of persons with disabilities and the environment. Priorities and resources should be clearly linked to results in order to foster looser earmarking and more flexible funding.
36. Members welcomed WFP's increased focus on oversight and risk management and looked forward to seeing further progress in these areas. They also welcomed the commitment to achieving gender equity at all staffing levels and the new measures for changing WFP's workplace culture.
37. Discussions of the COVID-19 response would be an important element of the planned food United Nations systems summit in 2021. Members recommended that WFP's contribution to those discussions draw on its work on improving food and social protection systems and strengthening food delivery and distribution networks as ways of protecting communities against the effects of COVID-19.

38. To prepare WFP for future challenges, members called for increased inter-agency cooperation and partnerships between humanitarian and development actors and urged all donors to step up their contributions. While global attention was focused on the COVID-19 response, WFP needed a solid, predictable funding base for all of its work, including in less visible crises. Without such support, many countries risked losing the fruits of decades of humanitarian and development assistance.

## **Other business**

### **Oral update on WFP's response to COVID-19**

#### **Update on WFP's implementation of United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/279 (repositioning the United Nations development system)**

#### **Oral update on the implications for WFP of the guidance on the United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks and common country analyses**

39. The Director of WFP's corporate response to COVID-19 warned that a global food emergency was imminent as the COVID-19 pandemic was inflicting severe damage on food systems, the informal sector and economies. In the absence of immediate action, an estimated 270 million people could face acute food insecurity before the end of the year.
40. Assistance requirements were set to peak between July and September, with Latin America and west, central and southern Africa among the areas of most concern. Thanks to a swift response from donors, WFP had received USD 1.88 billion in frontloaded contributions for its COVID-19 response. The organization had pre-positioned stocks and planned to scale up assistance to 38 million people brought to the brink of hunger by the pandemic while continuing to support 100 million direct beneficiaries of its pre-COVID-19 operations. Technical assistance and other services were being provided to governments and partners to aid their response to the pandemic.
41. WFP had revised its budget for the next six months to USD 7.9 billion, which included the scale-up of its COVID-19 response activities. The Director highlighted a USD 4.9 billion shortfall for this period, underscoring the urgent need for funding to respond rapidly to the immediate consequences of the crisis, optimize the use of cost-efficient procurement facilities and ensure operational readiness for new shocks. WFP was engaging with large development banks to broaden its funding base but faced particular challenges in securing funding for operations in middle-income countries and where its presence was limited. Given the severe impact of the crisis on many donor countries, the 2021 funding outlook was extremely worrying, and WFP called on Member States to help raise awareness of the scale of the challenge.
42. So far, WFP's common services operations had dispatched over 24,000 cubic metres of COVID-19-related items to 138 countries, transported 5,267 passengers to 50 destinations and assisted with 18 medical evacuations. Demand for cargo and passenger services was growing and new routes were opening up. WFP was also monitoring the commercial sector, ready to stand down services as soon as safe and reliable commercial services resumed. However, of the USD 965 million requested by WFP for these common services as part of the GHRP, only USD 181 million had materialized; unless more funding was received, common services would cease at the end of July.
43. WFP was playing a major role in the coordinated humanitarian response to the pandemic and in the design and implementation of the socioeconomic response. It was also one of the main contributors to the Secretary-General's policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition. United Nations country teams were increasingly referring to the socioeconomic response framework, and WFP had developed a medium-term programme framework that applied its changing lives agenda to the COVID-19 response, in harmony with the Secretary-General's framework.



44. The organization was continuing to engage in discussions related to the humanitarian-development nexus and to foster partnerships through participation in the United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) and the joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund. Internal coordination mechanisms had been strengthened ahead of an expected increase in country strategic plan (CSP) revisions related to COVID-19.
45. The Deputy Executive Director voiced grave concern that the COVID-19 crisis would reverse progress made towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2. He noted the key role of Member States in shaping the 2021 food systems summit and the next quadrennial comprehensive policy review, which represented opportunities to accelerate progress on partnerships in order to achieve SDG 2.
46. In spite of the crisis, reform efforts were continuing, particularly with regard to the regional and multi-country office reviews. The empowered resident coordinator system had been in place for over a year and although some country directors felt it was premature to assess its full impact it had produced a greater sense of inclusiveness, mutual respect and shared ownership in some countries. In others there were challenges related to resident coordinator office capacity and recruitment delays. A collaborative and flexible approach was key to ensuring that resident coordinators benefited from well-functioning country teams.
47. The Director of the Programme, Humanitarian and Development Division, provided an update on the programmatic aspects of United Nations development system reform. Interim technical guidance on United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks (UNSDCFs) and common country assessments had been approved; the final guidance was due to be published in July. Based on that guidance WFP had already prepared its own draft guidelines to steer staff through common country assessment and UNSDCF processes. The duration of CSPs would match those of UNSDCFs, with most CSPs presented for approval before the start of the terms of the frameworks. This would increase the workload of the Board at its November sessions because most UNSDCFs would start on 1 January. If there were delays in obtaining government approval of UNSDCFs, United Nations agencies would be able to exercise discretion and present their country plans to their Boards for approval regardless; WFP would consult its Executive Board in any such case. It would also be possible for agencies to wait up to one year after a governments signed UNSDCFs before seeking Board approval for their country plans. This level of flexibility would be particularly useful in the face of uncertainties generated by COVID-19, which could lead governments to revise schedules for national development plans, with consequences for agency programmes such as CSPs.
48. Board members thanked WFP for its frequent, thorough and transparent reporting on the COVID-19 response and for its prompt engagement with the Board on risk management and internal control issues. Members commended WFP staff working tirelessly in extremely challenging circumstances and highlighted the massive efforts being made to secure the transport of humanitarian and health workers and equipment.
49. Members voiced concern over the projected rise in hunger and noted that the pandemic was deepening food insecurity and inequality, not least in Africa where it was exacerbating the effects of drought, natural disasters and food crises. They underscored the importance of a strong collective and coordinated response to the crisis and urged WFP to conduct country-level joint needs assessments and share data with partners to ensure that the response was efficient and effective.

50. Some members said that the GHRP should be people driven rather than sector driven, with attention paid to gender equality, human rights and the rights and needs of persons with disabilities and other vulnerable people. They encouraged WFP to explore a broader use of cash-based transfers and vouchers, accompanied by the requisite fraud prevention measures.
51. Taking note of WFP's urgent appeal for common services funding, members called on all potential donors to contribute funding to the joint United Nations response to COVID-19. Some members commended the Executive Director for his success in mobilizing funding and developing trust among donors through his leadership of WFP. Others asked for details of WFP's involvement in MPTF projects.
52. Some members saw the crisis as an opportunity for the United Nations to put in place a more inclusive and ambitious food system based on solidarity and equality. While many members praised WFP's partnerships, especially with the other Rome-based agencies, one member urged WFP to extend its partnerships to the private sector, particularly in efforts to rebuild food systems. He also asked for more information on how COVID-19 was affecting refugee camps.
53. Board members praised WFP's commitment to the United Nations development system reform process and its progress in meeting several of the funding compact commitments. One member highlighted the positive approach of most country directors to the resident coordinator system; another, however, suggested that WFP hold an informal briefing to discuss some of the concerns with reform in detail. Some members described the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and UNSDCF implementation guidance as important tools in the transformation of WFP's programming.
54. One member sought to understand the extent to which WFP had changed its internal regulations and guidelines in line with the new United Nations management and accountability framework. He also asked for an update on the status of WFP candidates put forward for resident coordinator positions.
55. Management reported that since the start of the COVID-19 crisis WFP had worked with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to alleviate crowding in refugee camps and mitigate risks associated with delivery and distribution modes. However, food pipelines were very vulnerable and populations in refugee and internally displaced person camps were often entirely dependent on assistance. Testing was not available in many camps, even if contact tracing and isolation measures were in place. Refugees were also subject to movement restrictions that prevented them from reaching markets. Funding was critical, as even before COVID-19 WFP refugee operations in East Africa had been funded at less than 60 percent. UNHCR had also highlighted the need to support long-term camp residents who had previously achieved a degree of self-sufficiency. The agency had asked WFP to advocate the inclusion of these refugees in national social protection systems and to include them in its own assistance programmes.
56. Management clarified that many of the assessments that had generated the forecast figures of food insecurity related to COVID-19 had been inter-agency studies conducted with partners. United Nations country teams, including WFP, were engaged in several assessments on the ground linked to the GHRP and national socioeconomic response plans. They would form the basis of inter-agency submissions to the MPTF.
57. WFP agreed that cash and vouchers had a central role in the response to COVID-19; 47 percent of planned assistance would be delivered through these modalities, with 41 percent provided as in-kind food assistance, 10 percent as service delivery and 2 percent as capacity strengthening.

58. On the GHRP, management reported that the July update would include part of WFP's USD 4.9 billion funding shortfall across 83 operations through the end of the year, along with USD 965 million for WFP global common services. The GHRP also included a USD 500 million famine prevention envelope to address areas where a major deterioration in food security may occur.
59. WFP had participated in the first call for MPTF projects, which had involved 47 countries, including 26 where WFP had operations. WFP had received 10 positive responses, securing USD 4 million through proposals made in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme and FAO. Management saw the MPTF as a good example of United Nations reform unfolding in response to the challenges presented by COVID-19.
60. On United Nations development system reform, the Deputy Executive Director said that the positive aspects of the resident coordinator system outweighed the concerns; WFP would nevertheless welcome an informal consultation to examine any concerns. The political role of the resident coordinators was complex, particularly where humanitarian conditions were deteriorating and where they were required to represent multiple aspects of the United Nations simultaneously. The competition for scarce resources at the country level was also a challenge. WFP was continuing to put forward candidates for resident coordinator positions, including most recently the WFP country director for Senegal as the resident coordinator for Ecuador and the head of the centre of excellence in Côte d'Ivoire as the resident coordinator for Madagascar. Some WFP country directors had also served as interim resident coordinators, which was good preparation for serving in a regular resident coordinator position.
61. Regarding new guidance, the Deputy Executive Director noted that WFP had been among the first agencies to adjust its performance assessment system to enable resident coordinators to contribute to the assessment of country directors. Guidance had also been drafted related to programming and the management and accountability framework. Although some guidance was still provisional, a helpdesk was available and WFP was holding sessions at which regional and country directors could discuss concerns.

## **Resource, financial and budgetary matters**

### **2020/EB.A/3      Utilization of the programme support and administrative equalization account reserve**

62. The Officer-in-Charge, Budget and Programming Division, presented a proposal to transfer USD 30 million from the programme support and administrative equalization account (PSAEA) to the Immediate Response Account to respond to the increased demand for Immediate Response Account resources triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Saying that it would strengthen WFP's reserves – one of the designated functions of the PSAEA – she noted that the transfer, when added to the USD 8 million request for the staff wellness fund, would leave a sufficient balance in the PSAEA to cover four and a half months of programme support and administrative (PSA) expenditure at the end of the year. She added that, subject to Board approval on both counts, the projected closing PSAEA balance would be well above the two-month minimum balance set by the Board.
63. The Board approved the proposal without comment or question.

## **Administrative and managerial matters**

### **Address by staff representative bodies to the Board**

64. The General Secretary of the Union of General Service Staff (UGSS) of FAO and WFP said that UGSS wished to formally acknowledge the efforts of management during the COVID-19 emergency to safeguard the well-being of staff members and their families while continuing to serve WFP's beneficiaries, highlighting in particular the dedication of WFP's information technology technicians and its Executive Director who, despite falling ill with COVID-19 himself, had worked ceaselessly to focus the world's attention on those that WFP served.
65. Although the freeze on General Service staff recruitment had been lifted and many long serving temporary staff had been awarded posts, the temporary framework used for the recruitment exercise was still in place; the UGSS was of the view that WFP must adopt new recruitment and promotion practices that facilitated the recruitment of suitably-talented individuals and afforded all staff the opportunity for career development and growth. UGSS had been invited to participate in the development of a new General Service staff recruitment and promotion policy and looked forward to reporting on developments in that regard.
66. Due to the COVID-19 emergency, progress in response to the external review of the workplace culture and ethical climate at WFP had been slower than anticipated. UGSS remained hopeful that a supportive atmosphere that encouraged staff to report abuse could be put in place, but it was concerned that WFP was not obliged to investigate reported abuse.
67. UGSS was disappointed that it had not been fully consulted during the development of WFP's Performance and Competency Enhancement (PACE) tool but was in discussion with the PACE team to resolve outstanding issues. A number of divisions at headquarters routinely appointed consultants as supervisors. That was disheartening for staff members, and it was unfair to ask consultants to manage the long-term career aspirations and goals of staff on fixed-term and continuing contracts, especially considering that consultants were disadvantaged in various ways such as being ineligible to contribute to the staff pension fund. In addition to prejudicing them, the exclusion of consultants from the pension system threatened the system itself as the number of staff contributing to it steadily declined.
68. The open space policy at headquarters had been largely unsuccessful, but UGSS commended the WFP teleworking policy, which had allowed staff to balance family and work during the COVID-19 crisis. General Service staff had proven themselves to be resourceful, dedicated and highly productive during the crisis, and UGSS hoped that teleworking would be fully integrated into WFP's long-term operating procedures.
69. The President of the Professional Staff Association said that very few heads of United Nations agencies had had the courage to tell their staff what they thought of the global movement to combat racism. As far as he was aware, racism had never been formally discussed or analysed at WFP, no specific measures had been adopted to combat racism at WFP and no mention of racism was ever made in the reports on the disciplinary cases involving WFP that were pursued every year. Nonetheless, systemic racism plagued staff recruitment, evaluation, promotion and reassignment. Furthermore, the recruitment process for consultants and the large numbers of consultants working at WFP continued to impede efforts to promote diversity. Many international staff and their families were also affected by systemic racism in developed host countries, including in shops, restaurants, police stations and hospitals. It was time for the United Nations to act decisively to help end systemic racism.

70. Because of the COVID-19 crisis, WFP employees throughout the world continued to face significant challenges in carrying out their duties and caring for their families. Nevertheless, they remained committed to their mission to save lives. They had been quick to embrace the new tasks assigned to them and WFP had striven to ensure their safety. In some cases, however, WFP had failed to show flexibility towards colleagues facing difficult personal issues. Managers needed to trust their staff and allow them to work remotely if they were unable to report to their workplaces during difficult times, and it was crucial that all risks be considered carefully before staff were returned to their offices and normal work practices resumed.
71. The Professional Staff Association, which would celebrate its fifteenth anniversary in 2020, continued to support its more than 1,000 professional staff members. It had worked with the Human Resources Division and the Staff Wellness Division to secure an independent medical insurance contract and the allocation of social security services from FAO to WFP. The association had also held several meetings with the Senior Advisor for Workplace Culture on the preparation of the comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination and was eager to discuss concrete proposals resulting from the work to date.
72. The association was concerned by the high turnover of Human Resources Division directors, which impeded meaningful change, and it hoped that the next director would be chosen from within WFP and that his or her selection would be based solely on competence and experience.
73. Board members welcomed the statements by the staff representative bodies, expressing agreement with the points raised. They said that it was crucial to ensure equality of opportunity at WFP, particularly for African staff members, and to ensure that all staff reached their full potential. Staff evaluations must be gender- and colour-neutral, and all staff must be evaluated exclusively on the basis of their job performance. Management must constantly strive to hear the views of staff in that regard, and every effort should therefore be made to encourage WFP employees to take part in WFP's global staff surveys. Board members also asked how racism would be addressed in the comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination and called for it to be discussed at the next meeting of the Executive Board Bureau. Senior management must take steps to eliminate racism at WFP, which continued to prevent many staff from playing a full role.
74. The President said that racism should be a matter of relevance for all WFP staff, including senior managers, and endorsed the suggestion that the Bureau discuss the issue at its next meeting.

## **Other business**

### **2020/EB.A/4 Comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination**

75. The Senior Advisor to the Executive Director on workplace culture presented the comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination (CAP), which addressed the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination (HSHAPD). Once fully implemented, the CAP would result in an improved, inclusive and respectful workplace in which any issues related to HSHAPD were fully addressed.

76. Of the CAP initiatives already in progress, the Senior Advisor highlighted the inclusive consultation that had been held with 5,000 WFP employees to define five WFP values and their corresponding behaviours. Work was also under way to design and develop training for middle management and to refine the CAP communications plan, which included the launch of a WFP workplace website. The Executive Director was fully committed to the implementation of the CAP and had signed a new compact with his senior management team that enshrined it as a priority for all.
77. The Executive Board delivered a cross-List statement commending WFP for its strong commitment to tackling HSHAPD and for the consultative approach used to draft the CAP. It welcomed the clear identification of roles and responsibilities, the inclusion of gender-related initiatives and the significant improvements already made to procedures for responding to reports of misconduct.
78. In other statements Board members requested more information on the compact between the Executive Director and senior managers, the mechanisms in place to ensure middle management accountability for improvements to workplace culture and the approach to monitoring progress in CAP implementation, particularly during years when a global staff survey (GSS) would not be conducted. Members asked how WFP planned to prioritize resources for CAP initiatives and how management would improve the use of PACE to strengthen accountability for staffing decisions. Board members also called for greater involvement of the Ethics Office and the Office of the Ombudsman and requested a communications road map to understand how staff would be kept abreast of progress.
79. Observing that building internal collaboration and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic would be challenging, Board members asked how WFP planned to address reports of misconduct under these circumstances, particularly when staff experiencing abuse might be unable to leave their duty stations.
80. Referring to remarks made by the staff representatives under agenda item 10 c), some Board members asked how discrimination would be tackled under the CAP. One member asked for details of the external experts consulted by WFP during the design of the CAP. Another called on WFP to improve the response rate of the GSS, provide implementation timelines for all CAP initiatives and develop an action plan for staff training on how to report cases of misconduct. Several members underscored the importance of leadership setting a strong example for the rest of the organization; one urged WFP to address longstanding issues such as the types of contract used to engage consultants.
81. One member underscored the cross-cutting importance of inclusiveness, particularly with regard to persons with disabilities, and urged WFP to hold informal consultations on an inclusiveness road map that would be shared with the Board at its 2020 second regular session.
82. The Senior Advisor said that objectives, end states, activities, offices and implementation timelines were clearly set out in the CAP and would be tracked through a database. She said that changing workplace culture was a huge endeavour that required time, leadership commitment and resources. On the latter, she reported that between 2018 and 2020 USD 13.2 million had been allocated to workplace culture initiatives, in addition to USD 5 million allocated to the CAP itself. She assured the Board that despite COVID-19 CAP implementation continued to be a priority for the Executive Director and senior management, as seen in the results of the reprioritization exercise.

83. Turning to the compact, she reiterated that it represented the commitment of all 12 senior managers, who had contributed specific indicators and outcomes related to the CAP priorities. On reporting, she noted that the CAP key performance indicators had been selected to tie in with those of the GSS, the management plan and the annual performance report. The targets were deliberately ambitious, such as a ten percentage point increase in the share of staff members who believed that they were treated with respect at WFP, and zero cases of staff personally experiencing harassment or abuse.
84. While the next GSS had been postponed due to COVID-19, the Senior Advisor planned to give a progress report on CAP implementation at the Board's 2020 second regular session. The report would be based on a pulse survey. She added that the response rate for the last GSS had been 85 percent, which was 15 percent higher than the previous GSS and a good result for a voluntary survey. Nonetheless, WFP would continue to strive for the highest possible participation rate once it was conducted (in early 2021).
85. Regarding external consultations, the Senior Advisor said that WFP had worked with UNICEF on best practices for tackling harassment and sexual harassment, the United Nations System Staff College on training and a company called Walking the Talk, which had provided guidance and analysis for the values exercise. Two meetings had also been held with UNHCR to share best practices relevant to all aspects of the CAP.
86. The Senior Advisor said that PACE was an important tool; the new version had been launched in April and introduced 360° and 180° feedback, as well as fixed goals and expected accountabilities for management. The Director of the Human Resources Division added that WFP had one of the highest PACE completion rates of all United Nations entities and that the system was a key component of performance evaluation.
87. On training, the Director reassured the Board that WFP was taking a systematic approach that encompassed all levels of the organization, with targeted content for leadership roles and middle management positions. This was complemented by on-the-job training and mentoring.
88. WFP had strengthened its reporting mechanisms and had recently revised its disciplinary processes to increase communication with affected employees, manage expectations, expedite investigations and provide medical and psychological assistance. There was a focus on ensuring physical safety, distancing parties alleged to be involved in improper conduct and providing regular feedback on the progress of cases.
89. The Director said that WFP was committed to eradicating racial and sexual discrimination. Cases of discrimination had led to disciplinary action even in the past, but currently WFP systematically reported on all cases. The Senior Advisor confirmed that a road map would be shared with the Board, adding that the Deputy Executive Director was chairing a steering committee for the WFP disability strategy linked to United Nations systemwide work on disability inclusion. He would consult Board members on how best to structure an informal consultation on the issue.
90. In response to a question the Inspector General reported that in 2019 the Office of the Inspector General and Oversight Office (OIG) had received 145 complaints of harassment, of which 100 had been assessed and 29 had been opened for investigation, with nine investigations completed and three substantiated. She noted that complaints of discrimination were counted under the heading "harassment" in the statistics.

## Annual reports

### 2020/EB.A/5 Annual report of the Ethics Office for 2019

91. The Director of the Ethics Office outlined the mandate, structure and areas of work of the office. Demand for advice and guidance from the office continued to grow, and it had logged more than 1,750 activities in 2019. Advice and guidance were among the most critical components of the mandate of the Ethics Office, helping employees to understand the standards of conduct applicable to them to avoid wrongdoing, make sound ethical decisions and gain knowledge and skills. The issues raised by staff, including in response to the recent Black Lives Matter protests, guided the office in its education and outreach work. It was critical that advice be delivered by qualified and competent ethics professionals. The annual conflict of interest and financial disclosure programme continued to expand due to an increase in the number of employees and decentralization. The programme had the result of prompting staff to raise potential conflicts of interest that they otherwise might not report or even recognize.
92. The office had continued to provide guidance to management on the incorporation of ethical standards into policies and processes, including proactive input based on its work and concerns raised, to which management had been very responsive. The Ethics Office had completed the revised version of the annual conflict of interest and financial disclosure programme policy. For the circular, the Ethics Office had deferred the inclusion of reference to organizational conflicts of interest and would make a number of recommendations on that subject by the end of July 2020.
93. The office had also updated WFP's whistleblower protection policy. It had worked on six cases of alleged whistleblower retaliation in 2019 and recorded three advisories. There was much to learn about perceptions of retaliation, and the office was carefully reviewing the responses to the retaliation questions contained in the harmonious and safe workplace survey.
94. Board members welcomed the report and called for more financial and human resources for the Ethics Office. Members urged management to support the office's recommendation that an ethics advisory committee be established to support the ethics offices of the three Rome-based agencies and the request of the office to be involved in the new supervisor training programme and the new induction programme for country and deputy country directors led by the Human Resources Division. They also encouraged WFP to adopt mandatory annual ethics training, which was considered to be a best practice. Members supported the office's plans to update the external website so that it fully reflected the scope of WFP work and its commitment to a strong ethical culture, expressing concern that the number of external queries submitted through the website had declined, which suggested that it was no longer working effectively. The Director of the Ethics Office was asked how WFP was ensuring that cooperating partners, who frequently operated directly with beneficiaries, applied the same standards as WFP on protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). Members welcomed that the organization-wide strategy on PSEA would be informed by the work of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination sub-working group on safeguarding against sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, which WFP should finalize at the earliest opportunity. One member asked how issues related to victims of sexual exploitation and abuse would be included in the strategy on PSEA and how and to what extent the Ethics Office was using the results of the survey on sexual exploitation and abuse to formulate the risk-based approach that would guide WFP in that area. It was also asked when the Ethics Office's case management system, which would help it to track and analyse advice, would be launched, when analysis of the responses to the retaliation questions in the harmonious and safe workplace survey would be completed, and how that work would complement the CAP. Members also asked whether the Office of the Ombudsman would be involved in the design of the new induction programme for country



and deputy country directors and when the updated whistleblower protection policy would be made available to the Board.

95. The Director of the Ethics Office said that it was critical to assess the compliance of cooperating partners with WFP's standards on PSEA and that the office was working on additional partner training, including by working with a third party. The updated whistleblower protection policy had been finalized and would soon be made available to the Board. The organization-wide strategy on PSEA was nearing completion and would soon be made available to management for its input. She agreed that all relevant parties should be consulted in the formulation of the new induction programme for country and deputy country directors and supervisors and deferred to the Human Resources Division otherwise. She reported that a case management system had been implemented and would help the Ethics Office to identify areas in which ethics training was particularly needed. The office had completed a preliminary analysis of the responses to the retaliation questions in the harmonious and safe workplace survey and would submit recommendations based on them to WFP management and the Senior Advisor for Workplace Culture in the near future. The Ethics Office was working closely with the United Nations Victims' Rights Advocate, PSEA focal points and other relevant stakeholders throughout the United Nations system to formulate an integrated and holistic approach to PSEA to inform the PSEA strategy to present to WFP management.

**2020/EB.A/6      Annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2019 and management response**

96. The Director of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services presented the annual report of the Office for 2019, which focused on values and principles; promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion (an issue of particular concern in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement and ongoing protests against racism); and addressing abusive behaviour through a better juxtapositioning of formal and informal internal justice processes. She emphasized that informal dispute resolution mechanisms, including mediation, facilitation and shuttle diplomacy, were often more effective than formal ones in addressing abusive behaviour and disputes and promoting a respectful and inclusive workplace culture. It was vital to gender equality, diversity and inclusion that all employees reflect on their own thoughts and behaviour and seek to overcome personal biases. Conscious efforts were also required to make and keep teams diverse. Providing women and men and people from all backgrounds and regions equal opportunity was an important step in diversifying the workforce.
97. The Director of the Human Resources Division said that management welcomed the report and agreed with its recommendations almost in their entirety. Some of the gaps identified by the Ombudsman were already being addressed, both in the context of the CAP and as part of the ongoing work of WFP offices and divisions. Despite delays and reprioritization resulting from the COVID-19 crisis, significant progress had been made, particularly in reaffirming values and strengthening disciplinary processes.
98. Management had taken note of the reported increase in the number of visits to the Office of the Ombudsman in connection with allegations of HSHAPD. Other WFP offices dealing with those issues had also witnessed sharp increases in reporting, which should be seen as evidence of the success of ongoing efforts to promote a safe and harmonious workplace culture. The increase was also testament to the success of the Ombudsman in winning the trust of employees and encouraging them to speak up.
99. Members praised the work of the Office of the Ombudsman and called on management to provide human and financial resources in line with its increasing workload. Members expressed concern at the increase in the number of HSHAPD allegations but expressed the hope that it reflected the success of efforts to reduce HSHAPD rather than an increase in its

- incidence. Members said that WFP should welcome the fact that an increasing number of supervisors were requesting the Ombudsman to help resolve disputes.
100. Members said that all recommendations in the report were well grounded and appropriate, and some therefore expressed disappointment that management agreed only partially with some. Management was urged to accept and fully implement all recommendations, including, in particular, recommendation 7, as that would send a clear message that WFP was strongly committed to eliminating all forms of gender inequality. One member lamented that management did not intend to adopt compulsory mediation as prescribed in recommendation 10, saying that WFP should review dispute resolution at organizations that had successfully adopted mandatory mediation such as the World Bank. Another member asked the Director of the Office of the Ombudsman to provide further information on how the Office was highlighting structural barriers that prevented staff from reaching their full potential and to discuss some successful informal mediation initiatives that it had conducted.
  101. The Director of the Human Resources Division said that WFP had recently amended its policy on salary setting to eliminate any possibility of discrimination on the basis of race or gender; consideration was no longer given to an employee's previous salary, and all salaries were determined solely on the basis of employees' qualifications and experience. The Division would monitor implementation of the policy closely to prevent pay-related discrimination. Noting that the Charter of the United Nations already enshrined the principles of fairness and inclusion with regard to employment and that WFP was a United Nations programme, she suggested that it would not be appropriate for an external entity to audit or certify WFP's compensation policies.
  102. Moreover, due to the nature of certain disagreements and confidentiality concerns, mediation was not always appropriate. Furthermore, mediation could only succeed if both parties to a dispute agreed to it. Parties could be strongly encouraged to participate but mandatory mediation could not be effectively enforced by WFP and could moreover negatively affect workplace dynamics.
  103. The Director of the Office of the Ombudsman thanked the Board members for their support for the full implementation of all recommendations in the annual report. She welcomed the new WFP salary setting policy but reiterated that management should also consider the introduction of an equal pay certification process. The year 2019 had been a very demanding one for her office, which continued to deal with a heavy workload with limited human and financial resources. To invest in informal dispute resolution was to invest in dispute prevention. Indeed, the Office of the Ombudsman was ideally placed to bring to the attention of management the concerns of employees at all levels with regard to their workplace culture and environment.
  104. The Office was not calling for mandatory mediation. Instead, it proposed that when one party to a dispute preferred mediation, and mediation was deemed a viable option by the Office of the Ombudsman, WFP should consider making an initial mediation session compulsory for both parties, after which the parties could decide whether they wished to continue. Such an approach had been successfully adopted by the World Bank.
  105. In closing, she drew attention to a situation in which, through interventions, the Office had successfully resolved a dispute between a WFP employee from an African country and the employee's managers at WFP headquarters in Rome.
  106. In the light of the discussion above it was agreed, as proposed by the President, that the draft decision before the Board for consideration under the agenda item would be amended to make explicit that the Board supported all of the recommendations in the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services for 2019.

**2020/EB.A/7 Annual performance report for 2019**

107. Management said that feedback received from members during consultations had been incorporated into the annual performance report for 2019, which was the first year in which all WFP country offices had operated within the framework of the Integrated Road Map and reported against a single results framework – the Revised Corporate Results Framework (2017–2021). The report included an analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on WFP operations. An interactive webpage on WFP’s website highlighted major achievements and priorities in each thematic area.
108. Members applauded WFP’s achievements in responding to an unprecedented high number of Level 2 and Level 3 emergencies while continuing to provide common logistics services for its humanitarian partners. The increase in contributions received demonstrated donors’ confidence in the organization’s effectiveness and efficiency.
109. Members welcomed successful initiatives in cross-cutting areas such as accountability to affected populations, protection, gender equality and adaptation to climate change and in enhancing efficiency through the pre-positioning of food stocks, greater use of cash-based transfers and innovations such as the use of drones and digital technologies. They praised WFP’s support for social safety nets, including school feeding programmes, and its achievements in strengthening supply chains. The COVID-19 pandemic made such work more important than ever.
110. Noting the high number of employees completing training in the PSEA, members urged management to maintain progress in that area, taking advantage of synergies with and interlinkages to plans for improving workplace culture. However, there was still much to be done in promoting gender equality and wider inclusion, including of young adults, and targets for effective complaint and feedback mechanisms had not been met.
111. Members applauded WFP’s engagement in the ongoing reform of the United Nations development system but noted that WFP had achieved only 20 percent of the commitments arising from the most recent quadrennial comprehensive policy review. Members urged management to address that gap and asked how the pandemic would affect the rollout of reformed United Nations systems and processes.
112. A growing gap in funding and the expected economic repercussions of the pandemic highlighted the importance of expanding and diversifying WFP’s funding base and attracting more flexible funding. Clear corporate priority setting, comprehensive risk analysis and joint work with other organizations were essential. Members emphasized the importance of supporting middle-income countries, where investments in development would mitigate the effects of future humanitarian crises.
113. Members requested that future annual performance reports provide information on WFP’s contributions to interventions at the triple nexus and track results to show progress over several years. One member asked that an abbreviated version of the report be prepared in future years.
114. Responding to questions, management said that the benchmarks for measuring results were needs-based plans. Some apparent underachievements in performance in 2019 had resulted from the receipt of less funding than required to meet all the needs. Management was exploring cost-efficient ways of reporting on beneficiaries in the 18–30 year age group. A system for standardizing and improving community feedback mechanisms had been launched at the end of 2019.

## Policy issues

### 2020/EB.A/8 Mid-term review of the WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021)

115. Management presented the mid-term review of the WFP Strategic Plan (2017–2021), which incorporated input from cooperating partners, other United Nations entities and the WFP Executive Board. Taking into account the impact of major global trends on WFP operations, the review examined data from a wide range of sources to evaluate the priorities, implementation and results of the current WFP strategic plan. The review recommendations included increasing the focus on strategic partnerships, aligning the results of the strategic plan with its duration, providing incentives for country offices to develop transformative strategies and securing adequate financial and technical resources for implementation.
116. Board members welcomed the mid-term review, particularly the consultative process behind it, its focus on partnerships and long-term results and the positioning of cross-cutting issues related to adherence to the humanitarian principles, accountability to affected populations and protection as core programme areas.
117. Members called for increased investment in activities related to women's empowerment, gender equality, protection, the elimination of discrimination, the rights and needs of persons with disabilities and the green transformation. School feeding, local procurement and support for local producers and local governments in the areas of food security and safety nets were also cited as priorities.
118. One member said that emergency response and operations to save lives and livelihoods should continue to form the greatest part of WFP's work, warning that the organization could be weakened by engaging in development work when even funding for its emergency response operations was insufficient. Many others, however, said that sustainable development could not be achieved without a collective approach to addressing humanitarian and development activities; one member recommended that WFP consider links with SDGs 12–15, on responsible production and consumption, to contribute to sustainable solutions. Several urged WFP to focus on long-term results and to build resilience in local food supply systems and economies. One member said that effective tools were required to prioritize resources in complex situations, urging WFP to contribute to intersectoral, people-centred needs assessment and to reflect on recommendations from the recent evaluation of the funding of WFP's work.
119. On performance assessment, several members encouraged WFP to review the corporate results framework in order to improve the link between contributions and results and WFP's capacity to measure progress; one member expressed disappointment that it had not been possible to conduct a systematic performance assessment against all outcomes, objectives and results.
120. Several members asked how WFP planned to scale up strategic partnerships, private sector investment and flexible funding. One called on WFP to play an active role in United Nations development system reform efforts and to build synergies with other United Nations agencies, ensuring that in-country collaboration took place under the leadership of the resident coordinators.
121. One member said that priorities for the next strategic plan should include the introduction of a robust theory of change, the use of established SDG indicators to measure progress, and a focus on clear reporting, accountability and results. One member proposed that WFP hold an informal consultation on the theory of change to be used in the new strategic plan. Another said that WFP's role in preparedness and response to key global challenges such as COVID-19 should be incorporated into the plan. Several members suggested conducting an external assessment of the current strategic plan to inform the drafting of the next one.

122. One member urged WFP to make a greater effort to achieve gender parity in its own workforce and to advocate the humanitarian principles.
123. Several members observed that some of the mid-term review findings, particularly those related to funding, cross-cutting issues, strategic partnerships, the corporate results framework and transformative CSPs, could be implemented before the start of the next strategic plan. One member said that there was a need to strengthen the programmatic continuum between the three areas of crisis response, resilience building and root causes in CSPs.
124. Board members requested more information on a potential new memorandum of understanding with UNICEF, the integration of gender equality and environmental sustainability considerations into the new strategic plan and how feedback from partners gathered during the mid-term review process would inform programme design. One member requested a timeline for drafting the new strategic plan.
125. Management said that it agreed that progress was required during the current strategic plan, particularly with regard to partnerships and the funding and implementation of certain cross-cutting issues. The need to move away from extrabudgetary financing for the latter was clear and would be addressed as part of preparations for the next management plan; however, as no growth was foreseen in the PSA budget for 2021 except for emergencies, programmes and oversight, it would be challenging to cover cross-cutting issues from that budget immediately. The bottom-up strategic budgeting exercise would bring about the most significant change in this area.
126. WFP was committed to implementing its disability inclusion road map and reducing the environmental footprint of its programmes. It was also moving towards more strategic partnerships with partners such as UNICEF, with whom it had developed a new strategic and operational plan for reducing wasting prevalence through school feeding; joint initiatives with UNICEF on resilience and social protection were also being developed, although there was currently no plan to revise the memorandum of understanding between the two entities. Other key partnerships, with FAO, IFAD, UNHCR and others, would be discussed in more detail during the item on partnerships and funding evaluation.
127. WFP was committed to engaging in a very consultative process for developing the next strategic plan, which would begin in September. The mid-term review findings and recommendations would be the starting point for the new plan, which would address issues raised and seek to ensure that WFP was well placed as a partner to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Preparations for the new plan would entail discussions with the Board on WFP's multidimensional mandate and a theory of change.
128. The corporate results framework would be re-examined to improve how results and performance were reported. A mid-term review of the framework had concluded that improvements were needed in areas such as food systems, protection, disabilities, the triple nexus and capacity strengthening. In the short term, the framework would be simplified; in the long term, corporate results pathways or theories of change could be used to underpin each strategic result to aid decision making and performance management.
129. Management would ask the Office of Evaluation to consider how an external assessment of the strategic plan could be added to its workplan.

## Resource, financial and budgetary matters

### List D statement on oversight matters

130. Speaking on behalf of List D, one member delivered a statement pertaining to oversight issues in general. Noting concerns expressed by the OIG and the Audit Committee related to current risks and control weaknesses, she urged WFP to address high-risk and recurring issues before they affected the organization's effectiveness. Among the persistent and cross-cutting themes of most concern were workplace culture; workforce planning; food safety and quality systems; beneficiary management, including the provision in the near future of an update on registration and other automated systems issues; monitoring and review processes; oversight of government implementing partners through an internal monitoring system to be established; and fraud prevention.

### 2020/EB.A/9 Annual report of the Inspector General and note by the Executive Director

131. The Inspector General reported that in 2019 no material weaknesses had been identified in the governance, risk management or control processes in place across WFP that would seriously compromise the overall achievement of the organization's strategic and operational objectives.
132. Her team had noted that 37 percent of WFP's expenditure had been audited in 2019 and that one unsatisfactory rating had been issued; although the number of audits resulting in "unsatisfactory" ratings had fallen since 2018, there had been a rise in the number of "partially satisfactory with major improvements required" ratings. The causes of poor audit outcomes included problems related to prioritization of the implementation of action plans to address audit recommendations, a lack of direction from headquarters, decentralized decision making resulting in inconsistent internal control design in some areas, and excessive customization of systems and processes at the field level.
133. The caseload of complaints had grown more than 77 percent between 2018 and 2019, with 174 investigations worked on during the year. Approximately 50 percent of investigations completed or in progress were related to reports of fraud or corruption, and 27 percent to other forms of staff misconduct, including harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of authority and discrimination.
134. The Chief of Staff presented the note by the Executive Director on the Inspector General's report, which highlighted the positive audit opinion issued for 2019. The Executive Director continued to emphasize the importance of closing audit recommendations on time, noting that a new tool developed by the OIG facilitated the tracking of outstanding recommendations. A new mechanism had also been introduced to ensure that management set realistic deadlines for implementing audit recommendations.
135. The Chief of Staff reported that of the 21 recommendations issued as a result of the tone at the top audit 10 had been closed and 5 were due to be closed within the next two months; the remaining issues were being worked on with support from the Ethics Office and the Senior Advisor for Workplace Culture.
136. Board members welcomed the audit opinion and commended WFP for increasing the OIG budget, but many voiced concern at the growing number of audits calling for major improvement and WFP's lack of success in swiftly addressing persistent issues in areas such as the management of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), workforce planning and performance management.
137. One member endorsed remarks by the Audit Committee that management needed to drive continual improvement in all three lines of defence, thus enhancing its ability to prevent problems rather than react to them. Several members urged WFP to adjust its control and oversight mechanisms to reduce the risk of fraud and corruption, particularly given the

funding shortfalls that it faced and the additional strain to which it was being subjected by COVID-19.

138. Some members expressed disappointment at the backlog of overdue recommendations, warning that inaction could expose WFP to difficulties in the field, damage the credibility of the organization and ultimately undermine its results. Others praised WFP's success in implementing many recommendations despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that the number of high priority recommendations issued was very high.
139. The Inspector General informed the Board that the Office of Internal Audit was working on a real-time assurance project for COVID-19 controls, pursuant to which OIG would alert management through a memorandum as soon as any issue was identified. All such memoranda would be summarized and presented to the Board in the OIG report at the end of the year.
140. Management acknowledged the need to improve the implementation rate for audit recommendations, particularly in relation to areas of high risk of loss. In 2019 WFP had closed twice as many recommendations as in 2018; however, twice as many high-risk recommendations had been issued in 2019 as in 2018, leading to a net increase in the number of recommendations awaiting implementation. Management reiterated its commitment to acting on audit recommendations, highlighting several changes to procedures, including the confirmation of agreed actions by the Oversight and Policy Committee, especially for recommendations that had very broad impact, and the requirement for regional bureaux and division directors to sign off on the timelines set for the implementation of recommendations in the field.
141. Progress was being made on strengthening workforce planning, particularly through the performance management system, PACE. Management clarified that PACE was one of several sources of information considered by managers, and senior management was confident that poor performance was not being tolerated in the organization.

#### **2020/EB.A/10 Management review of significant risk and control issues, 2019**

142. Management said that the review of significant risk and control issues was based on feedback from management throughout WFP, alongside findings from the Audit Committee, oversight reports and corporate risk registers.
143. Board members welcomed the measures taken to address risks, saying that food quality and standards were particularly important because of their potential effects on WFP's vulnerable beneficiaries. Members requested additional information on oversight of programmes implemented with host governments and partner NGOs, measures for tackling cybercrime and plans for ensuring the availability of qualified personnel for rapid deployment in emergency operations.
144. Acknowledging that WFP's decentralized operating environment called for a degree of flexibility in the acceptance of risk, members nevertheless urged management to provide country offices with clear guidance on risk management policy and controls and to prioritize the implementation of outstanding recommendations from OIG. They asked management to keep the Board apprised of progress in addressing these issues and emphasized the importance of informing donors rapidly and transparently of all fraud allegations and risk of aid diversion.
145. Management said that WFP had an independent food safety and quality team and a new procedure for managing food safety and quality incidents; a food safety and quality manual had been drafted. A fraud assessment guide and fraud prevention handbook had been produced recently, and with training on fraud detection and mitigation, including for country directors, there had been an 80 percent increase in reporting of potential fraud versus 2019. To address cybercrime a data protection officer was being recruited. A framework for engagement with host governments was being developed, on which WFP would be able to

provide more detailed information later in the year. Capacity strengthening for NGO partners was challenged by WFP's ability to enter into only short-term contracts with its partners. Increased multi-year funding would help to address that challenge.

146. The Deputy Executive Director added that a future international talent pool of personnel and a structured way of globally rotating staff to ensure adequate support for emergency responses such as that for COVID-19 were being established, using funding from the Immediate Response Account.

#### **2020/EB.A/11 Annual report of the Audit Committee**

147. The Chair of the Audit Committee summarized the main points from the committee's annual report and its advice to management regarding improving the risk control environment; addressing outstanding audit recommendations; enhancing awareness of and capacity in enterprise risk management, particularly in respect of risks related to food safety, NGO management, beneficiary management and workforce planning; and maintaining a focus on improving workplace culture.
148. Board members welcomed the report and expressed their appreciation of the valuable support the committee provided to the Board and of its role in fostering transparency and accountability throughout WFP. Highlighting many of the views expressed in the report, members reiterated their calls for accelerated action on the implementation of outstanding audit recommendations and requested additional information on measures taken to address recurring issues, particularly fraud prevention; assurance of food safety and quality, which was essential to the health and safety of WFP beneficiaries; and enhancement of talent management and workforce planning, which they and the committee expected to see reflected in the next WFP people strategy. They looked forward to receiving more details on the plans for reprioritizing outstanding high-risk audit recommendations announced by management at the current and previous Board sessions.
149. As a multibillion dollar organization, WFP needed strong systems for enterprise risk management and internal control. Members echoed the committee in urging management to clarify WFP's risk appetite and to improve communications with regional bureaux and country offices with a view to fully embedding risk management throughout WFP. They also encouraged enhanced efforts to demonstrate the value of WFP's work in development and peacebuilding and suggested that evaluations could provide useful evidence to that end.
150. Acknowledging that the COVID-19 pandemic had created additional risk management challenges, members said that it was necessary to maintain an appropriate level of internal control. Noting that the crisis had resulted in changes to WFP's risk profile and the adaptation of some control measures to new circumstances, they urged management to continue to engage with the Board on the assessment of risk appetite and to keep the committee apprised of exceptional measures adopted in the face of the crisis.
151. The Chair said that the committee advised that WFP carefully measure any relaxation in controls, monitor for unintended consequences and take action to mitigate any such consequences. While recognizing that the implementation of some audit recommendations could take a long time, the committee advised that recommendations be implemented as agreed and that agreed timelines be realistic, in particular for high-risk items. The committee's view was that, to make progress on it, management should not make risk management too much of a quantitative exercise because risk also had a qualitative side that should be considered.



**2020/EB.A/12 Audited annual accounts, 2019**

152. Reporting on WFP's financial performance, management said that revenue had grown by 12 percent in 2019 to a record USD 8.272 billion, while expenses had risen 15 percent to USD 7.613 billion, for a surplus of USD 658 million, down 10 percent from 2018. The main reason behind the surplus remained the time lag between revenue and expense recognition at WFP. Contributions were the main source of revenue, with other revenue accounting for just USD 301 million, primarily from the provision of goods and services. Cash-based transfer expenses had increased by 21 percent, while expenses for food distributed had grown by 10 percent. Higher distribution and contracted services costs were primarily related to increases in food distributions. Staffing increases had resulted in 13 percent growth in staff costs, to USD 1.1 billion.
153. Turning to WFP's financial position, management reported a 15 percent increase in total assets to USD 9.435 billion and a 24 percent rise in total liabilities to USD 3.565 billion, for net assets of USD 5.87 billion. The resulting operational fund balances represented six months of operational activity, essentially unchanged from 2018. The increase in total liabilities included a notable increase in employee benefits liabilities that was primarily related to the use of a lower discount rate, reflecting lower market interest rates, to calculate net present value. Additional assets had been set aside to cover the liabilities and 75 percent of employee benefit liabilities were currently funded, compared to 80 percent in 2018. Management was closely monitoring financial markets for their impact on WFP's investment portfolios; as at mid-June, the investment return on the long-term employee benefit fund was flat (0 percent) and the short-term liquidity portfolio had returned 1.4 percent.
154. Comparing budgeted to actual amounts, management noted that the final budget of USD 12 billion for 2019 was 25 percent higher than the original needs-based budget. The utilization rate was 64 percent against the final budget and 87 percent against the implementation plan, i.e., the prioritized plan of work as of 1 January 2019.
155. Introducing the audit report on WFP's annual accounts, the External Auditor announced that the audit of WFP's financial statements had resulted in an unqualified opinion that the statements fairly represented WFP's financial position on 31 December 2019 and the results of its operations for that year. He drew attention to WFP's USD 658 million surplus, which was addressed in the Executive Director's statement in line with a 2018 recommendation on financial reporting. It was important to communicate to the donor community that the surplus was primarily attributable to technical accounting factors, including the lead time between fund collection and disbursement and the fact that a large proportion of contributions was received at year-end; it did not indicate that WFP was unable to spend the contributions it received. Similarly, the increase in staff benefits liabilities was primarily technical, arising from a change in the assumptions used regarding the discount rate, which represented a significant improvement in the quality of the long-term liability estimate. Finally, the External Auditor commended management for improvements in cybersecurity and the implementation of the SCOPE system for monitoring cash-based transfer beneficiaries, noting that such monitoring was a sensitive issue for some countries.
156. Board members expressed satisfaction with WFP's strong financial position but said that strong revenue growth called for continued and expanded oversight, particularly given the highly decentralized nature of WFP's operations. They welcomed the efforts of the Executive Director and management to implement the External Auditor's recommendations and the progress made in implementing the SCOPE system and addressing cybersecurity risks, and they encouraged sustained efforts to address the control and risk management issues identified in the audit report and continued expansion of SCOPE coverage. Members expressed approval of the increased use of cash-based transfers and the attendant prioritization of early risk identification within the programme but said that there was a continued need to prioritize cybersecurity policy. Some members expressed concern

regarding the impact of COVID-19 on WFP's funding and operations, and they urged increased local procurement and close attention to stock markets.

157. Management assured the Board that in the context of COVID-19 WFP was prioritizing local food procurement, which was already 22 percent higher than in 2019, and was closely monitoring fluctuations in the financial markets. While WFP continued to increase its use of cash-based transfers and to aim for full SCOPE coverage, the current focus was on remote financial oversight, for which measures were in place. Expectations for 2020 were for a deficit of about USD 400 million, with food distributions increasing by 20 percent and cash-based transfers remaining stable given the end of a large operation with the European Commission in April. Beyond 2020, management would steward WFP's finances as prudently as possible while hoping that donors would continue to be generous, because reductions in contributions had the biggest impact on beneficiaries.

**2020/EB.A/13 Report of the External Auditor on the real estate portfolio and management's response to the External Auditor's recommendations**

158. The External Auditor presented the report on the performance audit of WFP's real estate portfolio, which had examined WFP's real estate inventory, strategy and financial management, its headquarters expansion project and its efforts to comply with the United Nations system target of 50 percent of premises to be shared by 2021. The audit had resulted in 15 recommendations.
159. Management welcomed the recommendations, saying that their implementation would strengthen real estate management at WFP. Implementation of the recommendations had already begun, and it was noted that efforts to adapt headquarters to accommodate the growing number of staff would take into account experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic, which had unfolded after the audit report was completed.
160. Members expressed satisfaction with management's full acceptance of 14 of the 15 recommendations and the explanation for its partial acceptance of the remaining one. The performance audit was particularly welcome given its financial implications and its relevance to the 50 percent shared premises target. Acknowledging that the target was ambitious, particularly for a decentralized organization such as WFP, members welcomed WFP's proactive support for the principle of shared premises and the establishment of criteria for exceptions to its application. Management was encouraged to coordinate with WFP's partners in the United Nations system on its headquarters arrangements and to ensure that practical organizational considerations were taken into account when considering shared premises at the country level. Members also expressed support for the increased involvement of headquarters in strategic decisions on real estate in the field but raised concerns regarding the possible effect on the principle of decentralization. Regarding the financial management of premises, members said that they were pleased that there would be a feasibility assessment with regard to integrating the running costs of facilities with lease costs and invited WFP to provide information on the overall strategy for dealing with such costs while improving management procedures and traceability.
161. The External Auditor suggested that the observations in the audit report would have to be updated to reflect the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the financial management of premises, he noted with approval that management planned to assess the feasibility of fully implementing the audit recommendation aimed at improving the quality of real estate financial and management information. In terms of strategic decision making, he said that decentralization was essential for managing operations under way but was often less justified for decisions on real estate because they entailed medium- to long-term commitments. Furthermore, the audit had shown that country offices did not always apply the appropriate criteria to rent-or-buy decisions and did not always consult headquarters regarding important decisions.

162. Management noted significant change in facilities management as a result of COVID-19 that would need to be taken into account both at headquarters and global facilities. It agreed that in general it was desirable for real estate decisions to be taken at the local level because country directors had the best understanding of local conditions; given the long-term implications of strategic decisions on real estate, however, such decisions also required the involvement of regional bureaux and headquarters, which was in fact called for in existing directives. On the issue of common premises, management fully agreed that no opportunity to share premises should be missed and said that it was fully committed to working with country offices in that regard. On a practical level, the plan was to include appropriate guidance in the relevant WFP administrative services manual. Management also emphasized the importance of the environmental issues raised by the External Auditor and recalled that additional resources had been allocated to support the rollout of an environmental management system in 2020, which would allow additional capacity to be put in place at the regional level.

**2020/EB.A/14 Report of the External Auditor on air transport services and management's response to the External Auditor's recommendations**

163. The External Auditor presented the findings of the air transport services performance audit, relating to air services governance; budgetary and financial frameworks, including a possible reduction in the 4.5 percent management recovery fee and an increase in the funds allocated to aviation services from the 6.5 percent indirect support cost charge; risk management; operational strategy; and environmental impact.
164. Management praised the depth of the work accomplished by the External Auditor, which was of great value to WFP as the custodian of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service. All 16 recommendations of the report arising from the audit had been accepted, either fully or partially.
165. Board members underscored the importance of WFP's air transport services, which was being highlighted by the COVID-19 crisis. They noted the findings of the External Auditor's report and urged management to implement the recommendations in a timely manner. The development of an aviation operations policy document was viewed as particularly important; such a document, which could serve to address several of the recommendations, should be aimed at ensuring that WFP aviation services continued to meet humanitarian users' needs while remaining affordable for both users and donors.
166. Concerns were expressed regarding the transparency of reporting to donors, with the current level of detail and transparency on costs, performance, environmental impact and operations funding modalities considered insufficient; it was noted with appreciation, however, that WFP had agreed to restructure the annual report of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service accordingly. The environment was also of particular concern, and it was expected that WFP would strengthen the integration of environmental issues into its aviation services strategy to allow a clear view of the carbon footprint of its aviation services. With respect to risk management, the Aviation Service was encouraged to prioritize the rollout, already under way, of guidance for the inclusion of fraud risk in operations risk registers and to report to the Board on its progress at the 2021 annual session.
167. The External Auditor echoed the importance of developing a general policy document for air services but cautioned that the process would require taking a step back and reflecting on the issues identified, which would be difficult in the current time of crisis.
168. Management informed the Board that the May 2020 audit by the International Civil Aviation Organization had been postponed due to COVID-19 but that all necessary paperwork and agreements were in place.

**2020/EB.A/15 Report on the implementation of the External Auditor's recommendations**

169. Presenting the report on the implementation of the External Auditor's recommendations, management noted that 54 recommendations outstanding at the time of the 2019 annual session of the Board had been followed up on since then and that 33 of them, or 61 percent, were currently considered to have been satisfactorily addressed. The External Auditor had provided comments on the closure of those recommendations. The report described the action to be taken on the remaining recommendations and the associated implementation dates. Subsequent to the issuance of the report, an overview of the Integrated Road Map framework had been posted on the membership area of the Executive Board website, pursuant to recommendation 1 of the External Auditor's 2019 performance report on country portfolio budgets. In 2020, four new recommendations had resulted from the 2019 annual accounts audit and an additional 31 from the performance audits on the real estate portfolio and air transport services.
170. Management expressed appreciation for the constructive work of the External Auditor in providing critical feedback to management and assurance to Member States.
171. Members noted with appreciation the progress made in implementing the External Auditor's recommendations and encouraged WFP to continue efforts to address the open recommendations within the suggested timeframes. In particular they urged WFP to continue its work to enhance the transparency of staff and consultant recruitment processes and to pursue dialogue with donors to secure more flexible funding for country portfolio budgets.

**2020/EB.A/16 Replenishment of the special account for wellness programmes**

172. Management's presentation on the replenishment of the special account for wellness programmes complemented information provided at a recent Resource Management Department seminar for the Board and at the FAO Finance Committee session in June.
173. The special account for wellness programmes was based on WFP's five-year wellness strategy, a draft of which for 2020–2024 was nearing completion. Under the 2015–2019 strategy, an initial allocation of USD 18 million to the special account for wellness programmes had been depleted by expenses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which had required the provision of personal protective equipment for staff in all country offices and regional bureaux. Management was requesting the Board to authorize a replenishment of USD 8 million, USD 2.5 million of which would be used to repay a loan from the PSA budget. Since 2015 wellness funding had been made available to country offices on request and was therefore needs-based.
174. Recognizing the often difficult conditions under which WFP staff worked and the added risks imposed by the pandemic, the Board approved the replenishment. Members observed that the reputation of WFP depended on the performance of its staff, and the organization had a significant duty of care for the safety and well-being of its employees.
175. Responding to questions raised, management said that the strategy for 2020–2024 would retain many of the elements of the previous strategy and was therefore more of an update than a new strategy. The final draft of the strategy would be submitted to the Board at an informal consultation or during a formal Board session.

**2020/EB.A/17 Report on the utilization of WFP's advance financing mechanisms (1 January–31 December 2019)**

176. Management presented the report on the utilization of WFP's advance financing mechanisms, which described how WFP had used those mechanisms in 2019 to optimize the use of its resources by providing programmes with advance financing or spending authority based on risk-informed planning and forecasting. The increased flexibility of donors in making their contributions available for advance financing allowed WFP to make funds

available to operations before their confirmation dates and thus to ensure project continuity in spite of funding delays, to pre-position food to reduce delivery lead times and transport costs and to increase efficiency when launching or scaling up emergency response operations.

177. Board members welcomed the report, stressing that there was a need for increased flexibility in funding to enable WFP to respond to humanitarian emergencies efficiently. One member said that the Immediate Response Account was vital to WFP's crisis response and should therefore receive more funding.
178. Several members praised WFP for raising donor awareness of the importance of advance financing mechanisms, especially macro advance financing, with one suggesting that advance financing was just one example of the benefits of the reduced earmarking of contributions and urging WFP to take further steps to increase financial flexibility.
179. Several members highlighted the benefits of advance financing in food procurement through the Global Commodity Management Facility; one member urged WFP to explore opportunities to expand local and regional procurement to new regions such as Latin America while safeguarding accountability and transparency. Another asked for details of how the level of advances to be made was determined and adjusted.
180. Thanking the Board members for their comments, management clarified that WFP engaged in local and regional purchases wherever it operated; the Global Commodity Management Facility had a supply line in Latin America, which was however not currently active. On the determination and adjustment of advances to be made, management explained that they were defined based on WFP's programme of work (presented to the Board every November and refined on a monthly basis in pipeline reports) and forecasts of the level of funding available for country offices to purchase corporate stocks or access any advance financing facility; these predictions were based on historical funding trends and forecast resourcing figures produced by the Partnerships and Advocacy Department.

## Policy issues

### **2020/EB.A/18      Update on WFP's role in the collective humanitarian response**

181. Management's presentation focused on developments and initiatives in collective humanitarian responses since the circulation of the update on WFP's role in the collective humanitarian response for the current session.
182. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic WFP had ramped up its own interventions while also providing logistics and other services for its partners. As co-chair of the Operational Policy and Advocacy Group of the IASC, WFP management was participating in discussions on issues related to the global response to the pandemic. The Group had adopted interim guidance on localization for its members, and inter-agency training on and tools for ensuring PSEA had been launched in May 2020. A global memorandum of understanding signed in February by WFP and the World Health Organization strengthened cooperation between the two agencies in the COVID-19 response, while WFP and UNHCR had established a joint programme of excellence and targeting hub, under which nine technical experts and two in-country coordinators jointly employed by the two agencies were providing support to country offices.
183. Members thanked management for the comprehensive report, its focus on efficiency, effectiveness and innovation and the inclusion of a section on ethics. They applauded WFP's wide-ranging contributions to collective humanitarian responses, including the response to the COVID-19 pandemic; its leading role in global humanitarian clusters and shared humanitarian services; its promotion of the triple nexus approach; and its work to mitigate the impacts of climate change and support countries and people affected by migration.

184. Coordinated response involving diverse actors was important for the success of humanitarian action, and members expressed satisfaction with WFP's partnerships, including with national social protection systems and on cash-based programming, protection against sexual exploitation, harassment and abuse, and upholding humanitarian principles and resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and in particular United Nations Security Council resolution 2417 (2018), on conflict and hunger. Members recommended that in the face of persistent funding gaps WFP and its partners facilitate fundraising by moving from "siloes" ways of working to engage in joint needs analysis and prioritization that would inform donor decision making. WFP's engagement in efforts to implement the global compacts on migration and refugees was welcomed. In addition, members noted WFP's role in the Grand Bargain initiative and queried its future direction.
185. Members also recommended that WFP continue to invest in early warning and advance financing mechanisms, coordinating such work with national meteorological and hydrological services, the World Meteorological Organization and national disaster management agencies; focus its revised protection policy on the safety and protection of vulnerable people and communities, rather than extending it to cover broader issues such as data protection and climate change; incorporate a gender perspective into cash-based programming and increase the generation of gender-disaggregated data; and ensure that its complaint and feedback mechanisms for beneficiaries were safe and accessible and that users received adequate follow-up support from staff and partners in the field.
186. Responding to points raised, management said that WFP had received USD 148 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund in 2019; USD 183 million of a forecast total of USD 217 million for 2020 had already been received. WFP was seeking access to a new fund "window" related to gender equality and "leave no one behind" principles. Management would share the annual report of the Innovation and Knowledge Management Division, and a standard approach for the development and operation of complaint and feedback mechanisms had been launched in December 2019.

#### **Update on WFP's response to HIV and AIDS**

187. Management presented an update on WFP's response to HIV and AIDS, suggesting that it resonated in the context of COVID-19 because it was the global HIV/AIDS crisis that had forced the international community to look at global pandemics not only in terms of their spread but also their social and structural impacts, including on lives and livelihoods. The experience with HIV/AIDS had shown that food security and nutrition were prerequisites for effective prevention and treatment, a lesson that also applied to COVID-19.
188. WFP had both an HIV/AIDS policy and strategy and was one of 11 co-sponsoring organizations of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and a co-convenor of two inter-agency task teams on HIV-sensitive social protection and HIV services in humanitarian emergencies. WFP supported national HIV plans in 35 countries and, as at the beginning of 2020, addressed HIV and tuberculosis in 26 CSPs.
189. Many people were under the impression that the HIV/AIDS crisis was over, but it was not: at the end of 2018, 37.9 million people were living with HIV/AIDS, including 1.7 million newly infected people, with adolescent girls and women disproportionately affected. With COVID-19 in the picture, people who already had at-risk livelihoods, were food-insecure, had trouble getting treatment and medications or whose physical health was already failing and who might already have been a victim of stigma currently had to deal with the concurrent and overlapping diseases together. The collision of pandemics was nevertheless the new reality, and WFP was quickly preparing guidance on adapting existing programmes accordingly and making positive changes for its beneficiaries.
190. Members commended WFP for its work on integrating food and nutrition support into the global HIV/AIDS response, urging it to pay particular attention to pregnant women and older adults in the current context of COVID-19. In the long term, WFP and its UNAIDS co-sponsors

were encouraged to sustain and even reinforce their work under the new global UNAIDS strategy currently being developed.

## **Administrative and managerial matters**

### **2020/EB.A/19 Appointment of one member to the Audit Committee**

191. The Secretary to the Executive Board reported that, following an online meeting and consultation process during which it had reviewed her service to date and other materials, the five-member Board-appointed selection panel had recommended that Ms Agnieszka Słomka-Gołębiowska of Poland be reappointed to the Audit Committee for a second and final three-year term, until 29 July 2023. The Board approved Ms Słomka-Gołębiowska's reappointment.

### **2020/EB.A/20 Reports by the Joint Inspection Unit relevant to the work of WFP**

192. Management presented the document on reports by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) relevant to the work of WFP, covering seven new JIU reports and WFP's responses to 44 new recommendations. In all, management had followed up on 55 recommendations since the last report to the Board, of which 43, or 78 percent, had been closed. WFP's responses to the recommendations, information on the status of the recommendations and links to the JIU reports were provided in the annexes to the document.

193. Board members commended WFP on its good work in implementing the closed recommendations, which were considered particularly relevant in relation to United Nations development system reform, gender equality and inclusion of disabled persons, and also expressed their support for inter-agency cooperation. Questions were posed regarding the timelines for the resolution of the open recommendations, which were also important, particularly in relation to the policies on whistleblower protection and conflicts of interest.

194. Management said that a soon-to-be-published document on protection against retaliation would address four of the recommendations relating to abuses in the United Nations system. In connection with the recommendation open since 2017, the self-service travel system with an integrated online booking tool was due to roll out in 2020 (within the JIU timeline) but the rollout had been hampered by the recent upgrade of WINGS (the WFP Information Network and Global System) and COVID-19. With regard to recommendations on conflicts of interest, a pre-appointment conflicts of interest disclosure form had been prepared but a simplified online form was needed for global rollout. Further, it had proved difficult to find a suitable consultant to conduct organizational conflict of interest mapping. WFP nevertheless hoped to implement those recommendations by late 2020 or early 2021.

## **Evaluation reports**

### **2020/EB.A/21 Annual evaluation report for 2019 and management response**

195. The Director of Evaluation introduced the annual evaluation report for 2019, which gave an overview of centralized and decentralized evaluations conducted in 2019, developments in WFP's evaluation function and the priorities of the Office of Evaluation (OEV) for the year ahead. The evaluation work plan had been adjusted in response to COVID-19, with some resources directed to supporting organizational learning related to the pandemic.

196. Management welcomed the report and the continued commitment of OEV to conducting effective and efficient evaluations, noting the strategic importance of recent evaluations on the safety nets policy, the people strategy and funding. It praised OEV support for country offices and national evaluation capacities and looked forward to the publication of the OEV communication and knowledge management strategy, which would be aimed at ensuring that evaluation results were easily accessible and fully utilized in all areas of WFP.

197. Praising the structure, content and quality of the annual report, Board members commended WFP for the broad range of centralized evaluations completed in 2019,

particularly impact, policy and strategic evaluations. One member welcomed the repositioning of OEV, saying that it gave assurance of its independence. Other members praised OEV's use of innovation and workshops to promote the use of evaluation findings.

198. Members expressed support for OEV's involvement in interagency evaluations and real-time evaluations of crisis responses and of its commitment to the peer review of its methods, especially with regard to impact evaluations and the use of information from open assessments. One member highlighted the value of the cross-divisional taskforce on sustainable financing in support of high-quality evaluations.
199. Several members confirmed that evaluations were of clear importance for the design of the second generation of CSPs, praising OEV for strengthening country office evaluation capacity and for timing evaluations so as to deliver findings in time to inform CSP development.
200. One member sought clarification of the drivers of downward trends in certain key performance indicators such as those related to evaluation coverage and the implementation of evaluation recommendations. He also requested more information on the gender composition of evaluation teams. Another member asked why there had been a decrease in the proportion of evaluations that met or exceeded independent quality standards.
201. One member encouraged WFP to foster a culture of evaluative thinking, connecting priorities to resources and results in order to increase transparency and accountability and, ultimately, secure more flexible funding. She urged WFP to integrate evaluation insights into the development of the next strategic plan.
202. One member asked how the Board could support OEV and help WFP achieve policy coherence, suggesting the establishment of a Board sub-committee or working group on evaluation. Another member called for more evaluations to be conducted in the Latin America and Caribbean region.
203. Regarding the impact of evaluations, the Director of OEV said that in 2021 OEV would present a new report that would examine the extent to which recommendations from policy and strategic evaluations conducted since 2016 had been followed up.
204. She welcomed the suggestion to explore how the Board could contribute more to work on the evaluation function, both in terms of what OEV presented to the Board and in the development of the new evaluation policy, and said that the Board had an important role to play in reflecting on what WFP's evaluation function should be in the future.
205. Noting that OEV was completing the first batch of CSP evaluations, she assured the Board that OEV would be examining WFP's work at the nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding operations, including through specific questions in CSP evaluations.
206. She took note of the request to increase evaluation coverage in Latin America and the Caribbean, where she agreed that there was scope for greater use of decentralized evaluations and increased engagement with country-led evaluations of national policies and programmes.
207. The Deputy Director of OEV reported that the noted decrease in the quality of evaluations was largely related to decentralized evaluations. OEV had examined the four evaluations that had not reached the required quality threshold: one had been conducted without informing the regional bureau or OEV and therefore without support, while another had been led by an evaluation team with no prior experience with WFP. In response, OEV was strengthening the oversight of decentralized evaluations and working to ensure that evaluators who were new to WFP were given sufficient support. OEV was also working on its quality assurance systems to identify other areas to strengthen.



208. OEV tried to achieve gender parity in its evaluation teams as much as possible. The office was also seeking to increase the diversity of its centralized evaluation teams, which were still mostly from developed countries.
209. Management acknowledged the fall in the share of recommendations closed in 2019, saying that it had been driven in part by a rise in the number of evaluations and the number of recommendations issued following each evaluation. The kind of evaluations being conducted was also resulting in more complex recommendations than in the past, some of which required partnerships with host governments and other entities to implement. WFP was finalizing the rollout of a new evaluation tracking system to help country offices monitor their implementation rates and better manage their deadlines.

**2020/EB.A/22      Summary report on the evaluation of WFP's Gender Policy (2015–2020) and management response**

210. The Director of Evaluation presented the evaluation of WFP's Gender Policy (2015–2020). The evaluation found that WFP programmes were not consistently adapted to the specific needs of women, men, girls and boys and that equal participation of women and men in programme design was not yet systematic. WFP had not met the human and financial resource targets set out in the gender policy and there had been only modest progress towards gender parity. The evaluation called for an update of the policy, a broadening of leadership focus beyond gender parity, translation of the policy's objectives into activities to be implemented at the regional and country levels and increased financial and human resource investment. The evaluation made eight recommendations, all accepted by management.
211. Board members expressed satisfaction with the report and with management's commitment to implementing its recommendations within the indicated timelines. Management was encouraged to set out concrete commitments for its response to the evaluation and to report to the Board on its progress, in writing, at the Board's 2021 annual session.
212. Members said that while progress had been achieved in a number of areas, translating the policy into practice remained a challenge. Members welcomed management's decision to establish a steering group on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) and highlighted that in updating the gender policy WFP should engage women's rights organizations and strengthen accountability to, and the leadership of, women and girls to ensure that their voices were heard. WFP should also seize the opportunity to further align the policy with the Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action and the IASC Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action. The updated policy should also be aligned with WFP's protection policy.
213. Members strongly supported the allocation of additional financial resources for implementation of the policy and sought clarification on how performance against the 15 percent corporate funding target would be measured. Investments in additional human resources and the strengthening of gender capacity in regional bureaux and country offices were also supported, along with calls for programme-specific training and context-specific support.
214. Members encouraged a strong and clear focus on GEWE in WFP's next strategic plan and the mainstreaming of gender in the second generation of CSPs. Members noted the decrease in corporate-level gender equality partnerships, highlighting that in order to ensure a lasting effect partnering with relevant organizations and governments should not be neglected.

215. Members said that cash programming had great potential for improving GEWE and achieving transformative outcomes for all beneficiaries. The collection of sex and age disaggregated data and gender analysis at the household and intra-household levels had first to be improved, however, and members invited WFP management to reflect on the reasons for the persistent weakness in the collection of disaggregated data to address the issue effectively.
216. Management said that the timing of the evaluation meant that the evaluation findings and the Board's comments and priorities would be taken into account in the strategic reflection that would lead to the updating of the policy and the design of the second generation of CSPs. The Board's comments and suggestions would constitute valuable input for the development of the steering committee's terms of reference and the committee would be key in prioritizing gender and ensuring that the appropriate capacity was in place at the regional and country levels. An online tool expected to be in place by year's end would enable tracking of the financial resources being allocated to gender activities and of WFP's performance against its 15 percent target.
217. Management concurred that women's empowerment was a key benefit of cash programming but said that studies had shown that to have an impact cash-based transfers had to be part of a package that also informed women of their rights, increased their financial literacy, addressed unpaid care work and introduced livelihood activities. Management reiterated WFP's commitment to the collection and use of sex and age disaggregated data, along with the conduct of gender analyses. Moreover, WFP was aiming to leverage partnerships for more robust data collection and analysis and was currently working with Gallup to collect data on food security related to women's empowerment and with the International Women's Development Agency on data collection at the individual level.
218. The Director of Evaluation highlighted the growing body of evidence and good practices deriving from WFP evaluations, particularly CSP and decentralized evaluations that looked at country-level gender performance and progress towards SDG 5. In addition, the Global COVID-19 Evaluation Coalition, of which WFP was an active member, would soon publish a note on food security, followed by a note on gender and education, which would capture key lessons learned from WFP evaluations. Gender was also the subject of a forthcoming IASC inter-agency humanitarian evaluation, which would look at GEWE and how it had been implemented in emergency operations. Finally, three impact evaluations on gender and cash programming were currently under way in El Salvador, Kenya and the Syrian Arab Republic, which would help country offices and WFP make decisions about cash-based programming that maximized benefits to beneficiaries and contributed to GEWE.
219. As a final note, management said that efforts to reach gender parity among WFP staff had resulted in nearly 2,000 women being hired in recent years, which would naturally increase the attention paid to gender issues at WFP.

**2020/EB.A/23      Summary report on the strategic evaluation of funding WFP's work (2014–2019) and management response**

220. The Director of Evaluation presented the six main conclusions from the evaluation of funding WFP's work: the overall volume of funding was good, but crisis response was better funded than resilience building and development work; dependence on voluntary contributions was not fully suited to the changing funding environment; the shift to more flexible, multi-year funding that adoption of the Integrated Road Map was expected to produce had not yet materialized; WFP's funding ambitions were not always fully realistic; capacity for partnerships, resource mobilization and related functions was strained, particularly in country offices; and limited opportunities for internal resource allocation hampered WFP's adoption of more strategic priorities for driving funding decisions. Management agreed in full with the eight recommendations derived from the evaluation.

221. Board members welcomed the evaluation report and management's positive response to the findings and recommendations as presented by the Assistant Executive Director for Partnerships and Advocacy. Of particular note was the clarification of links between WFP's dual mandate and its funding priorities; building staff capacity in resource mobilization, communications, marketing and innovative financing; and diversifying funding sources, including the private sector and through collaboration with other United Nations agencies. The likely impact of the COVID-19 pandemic made an effective fundraising approach more important than ever. Members recommended that management enhance dialogue with Member States, governments and potential donors, explore development funding opportunities and partnerships with international financial institutions, multilateral banks and bilateral actors and derive ways of demonstrating WFP's evolving role in changing lives. One member mentioned forecast-based financing for work on building preparedness in collaboration with national actors as an innovative and potentially cost-effective funding source for WFP actions.
222. Members called on donors to provide more flexible, predictable and multi-year financing while also recognizing the value of large-scale earmarked contributions, which were key to enabling WFP to meet its humanitarian mandate. This combination of funding approaches by donors enabled WFP to respond to protracted crises, contribute to interventions at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and strengthen its relationships with NGO partners. Management was encouraged to ensure coherence between WFP strategy and donor funding priorities and clarify the links between WFP's objectives and goals and its funding ambitions in the next strategic plan. Members welcomed management's plans for launching a broad consultative process that engaged donors and other stakeholders in the planning process. Such consultation would provide insights into why fundraising for some WFP activities had not been successful.
223. The Director of Evaluation thanked the Board for its positive response to the evaluation and expressed satisfaction with management's engagement in implementing the recommendations.
224. Management took note of the advice and encouragement of members and reiterated its commitment to timely implementation of the recommendations. Between 2017 and 2020, the proportion of total contributions earmarked at the activity level had decreased from 77 to 72 percent and the proportion of multi-year funding had risen from 16 to 22 percent. Although flexible multilateral funding had decreased from 6 to 5 percent of the total, the amount received had remained stable. It was recognized that the COVID-19 crisis could impose extra limitations on donors. WFP's exploration of innovative financing focused on three main areas: multilateral co-financing with governments, debt relief and debt swaps, and blended finance. However, some initiatives might be incompatible with WFP rules and regulations.

**2020/EB.A/24      Synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations (2011–2019) and management response**

225. The Director of Evaluation presented the synthesis of evidence and lessons from WFP's policy evaluations from 2011 to 2019, which had identified inconsistencies in policy definitions, typologies and oversight in addition to gaps in the coverage of cross-cutting issues and competition between overlapping policy areas. Concerns were also detected regarding the information used by WFP to report progress on implementation of agreed actions following evaluations. The synthesis provided four policy lessons and six recommendations.

226. Management welcomed the synthesis, saying that it was well timed to inform efforts to improve the set-up and coherence of WFP's policy framework. WFP had established an interdivisional policy cycle task force that, among other things, would work with the Executive Board Secretariat on the planning of policy discussions by the Board. The taskforce would be guided by the synthesis recommendations, particularly recommendation 1 on policy cycle procedures. An update of the 2011 WFP policy formulation document (also known as the "policy on policy") would be submitted for internal review in mid-2021 before being presented to the Board.
227. Management had already taken action in response to the synthesis recommendation, establishing a new oversight and policy committee under the chairmanship of the Executive Director, starting work on a new policy framework, reviewing policy cycle guidance and reformulating the 2020 policy compendium ahead of the 2020 second regular session of the Board. Management was working closely with OEV on the design of second-generation CSPs, on more regular reviews of outstanding evaluation recommendations and on ensuring that future policy management was founded on knowledge, evidence and learning.
228. Board members welcomed the synthesis and the commitment of WFP management to implementing its recommendations. Several members noted that the synthesis identified significant weaknesses in WFP's policy formulation and implementation related to the coherence and substance of its policies. Warning that these issues could undermine programme quality, members urged WFP to systematically promote mutually reinforcing policy actions to achieve agreed objectives.
229. Board members took note of the new policy cycle task force and said that they agreed with the synthesis that an updated policy framework would help to clarify priorities and ensure that cross-cutting issues were handled appropriately. One member said that the recommendations should be implemented in the new strategic plan and the new management plan. She also underscored the importance of sufficient funding and capacity building to successful policy implementation, as well as better accountability through priorities that were linked to results. In that context, she asked how WFP intended to improve its strategic communication, practical guidance and the use of role models.
230. Board members urged WFP to provide regular updates to the Board on progress in this area.
231. Underscoring its intention to continue dialogue with the Board, management confirmed that the findings and recommendations of the synthesis were already clearly reflected in the interdivisional task force workplan. WFP would endeavour to tighten the relationship between its strategies, policies and programming, particularly in relation to the next generation of CSPs. The organization would also seek to develop thematic partnerships that would inform policy development and implementation.

#### **2020/EB.A/25 Implementation status of evaluation recommendations**

232. The Director of the Performance Management and Reporting Division introduced the report on the implementation status of evaluation recommendations, which examined 112 evaluations presented to the Board between 2008 and 2019. At 64 percent, the recommendation implementation rate in 2019 was 17 percentage points lower than that of 2018, partly due to an increase in the number of evaluations conducted and the number of recommendations issued per evaluation. Certain types of evaluation also appeared to produce more complex recommendations that required longer to implement.
233. Underscoring WFP's commitment to improving the implementation rate, the Director reported that management was exploring ways to involve senior leadership in reviewing and approving the closure of recommendations. New software for tracking risks and recommendations would be rolled out later in 2020 to replace the current tracking system and provide better oversight, follow-up and reporting.

234. Board members praised WFP's capacity to learn from the evaluation function and welcomed the introduction of the new tool. They stressed the importance of implementing all evaluation recommendations and encouraged WFP to view the increase in recommendations as an opportunity to improve how it served vulnerable populations. One member asked how management planned to address the lower implementation rate for recommendations from policy evaluations, suggesting that the policy framework being developed in response to the synthesis of policy evaluations could help in that regard.
235. The Director of OEV thanked the Board members for their continued interest and emphasized the value of evaluation recommendations to the organization, adding that the new system would enable management to work more closely with those responsible for closing recommendations and thereby increase the implementation rate. Saying that the policy synthesis had highlighted the importance of the quality of management responses, she suggested that management needed to commit to actions that were feasible and had realistic implementation timelines, especially for more complex actions. She agreed that some evaluations highlighted systemic and structural issues that could not be fixed quickly. In recent years, she and the Deputy Executive Director had ensured that issues emerging from centralized evaluations – particularly systemic and cross-cutting ones – were brought up for discussion by the oversight and policy committee before each Board session.

## **Operational matters**

### **East Africa portfolio**

236. The Regional Director for East Africa said that before the pandemic WFP had initially estimated that 24 million people were food insecure in the nine countries in East Africa and had planned to assist 21.7 million, at a cost of USD 2.7 billion. In addition to the conflict, insecurity and effects of climate change that normally drove food insecurity in the region, COVID-19 and a desert locust outbreak were exacerbating food insecurity and undermining livelihood and development gains that had taken years to build. As a result, the estimated number of food-insecure people had grown to 41.5 million, a 73 percent increase from the pre-COVID-19 number.
237. To respond to the COVID-19 crisis, WFP was adjusting existing programmes and planned to assist an additional 3.9 million beneficiaries, for a total of 26 million. Funding required for the second half of the year was USD 1.7 billion, and the shortfall was currently USD 1 billion. WFP had helped to increase stocks at refugee camps and scaled up its monitoring systems and assessments to inform targeting and prioritization. It had received authorization from many governments across the region for passenger flights and had recently established a humanitarian air hub in Addis Ababa in close collaboration with the Government of Ethiopia.
238. The locust outbreak, which had begun in January 2020, was currently in its second phase, which FAO projected could be 20 times worse than the first, potentially affecting an additional 2.5 million people. Already tens of thousands of hectares of farmland and pasture across the region had been damaged. WFP was scaling up its resilience activities and supporting FAO and governments where possible. The Regional Director expressed appreciation for donors' support for that effort.
239. Reporting on WFP's level 3 emergency operation in South Sudan, the Regional Director said that 6.4 million people were expected to be severely food-insecure at the height of the 2020 lean season. The security situation across the country had been fragile at the height of the hunger season, and rates of displacement, casualties and fatalities for January–May 2020 had outpaced those for all of 2019. The ongoing violence created critical challenges for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and he encouraged WFP's partners to advocate a cessation of hostilities and progress on the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan. WFP had already reached 3.8 million beneficiaries and launched a largely urban intervention to reach an additional

- 1.6 million. It had already pre-positioned 147,000 mt of food in advance of the wet season, and it was confident of making additional progress towards its pre-positioning target.
240. Another area of focus for WFP was Burundi, where a new government had just been formed following peaceful elections in May. Due to the unexpected death of the former president, the candidate of the ruling party had been declared the winner and had taken office on 18 June. The new president had set food security and COVID-19 among the top priorities and stated his willingness to work closely with the international community, including WFP. Burundi had high levels of food insecurity and undernutrition and the second-highest stunting rate in the world. WFP nevertheless saw a real opportunity for the country to build a positive era, for which it was crucial for Burundi to receive the international community's attention and assistance. WFP wanted to work with all governments to support Burundians at the current vital moment.
241. In positive news for the region, studies conducted by WFP in conjunction with the University of California at Davis to quantify the economic impact of WFP's activities had shown that there was a multiplier of 1.9–2.5 for every dollar transferred by WFP. In addition, as part of its ongoing emphasis on local and regional procurement, WFP had purchased 322,000 mt of food valued at USD 158 million in 2019, thereby strengthening countries' agricultural sectors, supply chains and economic development.
242. WFP was also investing heavily in partnerships both in response to COVID-19 and beforehand. WFP was developing and supporting the East African Community and working closely with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. For the first time, WFP was engaged with the International Monetary Fund and had also strengthened its relationship with the World Bank, particularly with regard to analysis and investment in social protection. Thus, although COVID-19 was a challenge WFP saw ways to strengthen partnerships to make itself more effective.
243. For the remainder of the year WFP expected to continue to respond to shocks as they came, particularly in relation to COVID-19 and locusts, and to continue to engage with the Government of Eritrea to explore opportunities to further support food security. Finally, it was launching a regional innovation hub in Nairobi to build on work at the Innovation Accelerator in Munich and other activities in the region to ensure that WFP was able to deliver on its objectives.
244. Members said that they appreciated WFP's efforts to adapt its activities to take into account the added impact of COVID-19 and desert locusts on the region, and they underscored the importance of the new innovation hub in Nairobi as a means of scaling up innovation and building capacity in the region.

#### **2020/EB.A/26 Country strategic plans — Ethiopia (2020–2025)**

245. The Ethiopia Country Director reported on the ongoing unrest in parts of Ethiopia following the recent murder of Mr Hachalu Hundessa, a popular musician and social activist. Staff at all WFP locations in the country were currently safe, but the added insecurity, including the loss of internet connections, was significant. Along with other United Nations agencies, WFP was implementing "stay at home" arrangements for staff in Addis Ababa and at three other locations.

246. Following a short video on Ethiopia and a brief presentation of the CSP for that country, the Country Director warned that WFP faced a funding shortfall of USD 158 million to the end of 2020; without new funding commitments it would be forced to suspend interventions for malnourished women and children and reduce rations for refugees. A revised United Nations humanitarian response plan launched in June to take into account the impact of COVID-19 and the desert locust infestation had received only 28 percent of the funds required.
247. Members welcomed the CSP document, WFP's engagement with partners in its drafting and its inclusion of a detailed transition and handover strategy for each strategic outcome. They applauded WFP's resourcefulness in responding simultaneously to the COVID-19 pandemic and the desert locust crisis; efforts to strengthen social protection programmes and supply chain capacity with partners; diversification of livelihoods initiatives; focus on nutrition, including through a joint programme on school feeding, nutrition and social protection with UNICEF; rollout of a complaint and feedback mechanism; and development of technological and other tools for mitigating climate shocks, including early-warning systems, satellite-based insurance and climate risk mitigation programmes.
248. Many members welcomed WFP's plans to move from relief activities towards social protection, safety nets and resilience building, to increase the use of cash-based transfers and to expand its engagement at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus; work at the nexus was highly relevant in Ethiopia and could generate best practices for use elsewhere. At the same time, however, it was important that WFP maintain its emergency work, including through its responsibilities for the food pipeline and logistics cluster.
249. Expressing appreciation for WFP's commitment to developing an evidence-based targeting and prioritization strategy – which would assist donors in their funding decisions – members urged management to ensure close monitoring of the impacts of COVID-19 and of the food security of refugees as they moved in and out of the labour market. WFP would need to be flexible in providing assistance that met immediate needs. Members welcomed the recruitment of additional field monitors.
250. The mainstreaming of gender considerations throughout CSP activities could be strengthened by the inclusion of gender-specific strategic outputs and enhanced gender analysis such as the use of sex-disaggregated baseline data, greater consideration of the implications of sex- and gender-based violence for food security and livelihood opportunities, and analysis of women's role in agriculture and the division of labour within households. Saying that there was an overall absence of reference to sexual and reproductive health and rights in WFP's work, one member welcomed the inclusion of the United Nations Population Fund as a partner in the CSP.
251. Thanking Board members for their strong support, the Country Director said that WFP's monitoring of the impacts of COVID-19 included the conduct of joint assessments with other agencies and the Government's national emergency coordination centre. The revised humanitarian response plan captured the impacts of the desert locust infestation, COVID-19 and flooding. WFP would address any significant deterioration in food security resulting from COVID-19 through a revision of the CSP based on discussions with the Government and donors. Beneficiaries received timely information through the help desks, telephone hotlines and text message service of WFP's complaint and feedback mechanism. The productive safety net programme for 2020–2025 was in the final stages of drafting and the Government had agreed to an increase of 23 percent in the value of the programme's cash transfer, but conclusion of the drafting awaited the outcome of discussions with the International Monetary Fund on the Fund's support programme.

**West Africa portfolio**

252. The Regional Director for West Africa reflected that the crisis in the region could be seen as an opportunity for change if its lessons were learned – lessons that had not been fully comprehended a decade earlier during the global financial and food price crises. Those lessons required a response on three levels: ramping up crisis response to address sizeable immediate needs; further strengthening integrated resilience-building work with communities to put them in better stead to withstand current and future shocks, working with the Rome-based agencies and UNICEF; and pivoting some of the region's work towards strengthening national social protection systems and more resilient food systems to address root causes that would enable a move towards zero hunger. All those efforts required work across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and working in partnership with others.
253. Food insecurity had emerged as a critical aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic in West Africa. The region had seen growing food insecurity even before COVID-19 due to the combined impact of exponential demographic growth, extreme poverty, climate change in a fragile ecosystem, proliferating armed conflict and population displacement. Prior to COVID-19, 21.2 million people had been expected to be food-insecure during the 2020 lean season, 8 million more than in 2019. The pandemic had resulted in a two-and-a-half-fold increase in that estimate, to at least 57.6 million people. It had exacerbated pre-existing causes of food insecurity across the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and the Central African Republic while creating new hotspots of food insecurity in urban and peri-urban areas, mainly in the coastal countries, with Sierra Leone and Liberia being of particular concern. The pandemic's social and economic impact on existing vulnerabilities and the peace and stability of the region had overshadowed health concerns.
254. Starting from the region's easternmost flank, he said that the Central African Republic had seen several waves of conflict since independence in 1960; attention and resources continued to be concentrated on the capital and its environs, while the hinterlands and periphery remained neglected, which hindered efforts at state-building and sparked flare-ups in violence. Armed groups continued to vie for control over swathes of the country and its natural resource wealth, despite a peace agreement signed in February 2019. The country had already been in an "extremely alarming" food situation, ranking last on the 2019 Global Hunger Index, and COVID-19 had made it even worse. The year 2020 was crucial for the country, with national elections planned at year's end; if successful, they would mark the first time in the country's history that two consecutive legitimate national elections had taken place. It was therefore a critical time to maintain support for the country, the site of one of WFP's most under-funded operations and one of the world's most under-reported emergencies.
255. Further west, the security situation in the Lake Chad Basin, including Chad, Cameroon, the Niger and Nigeria, had also deteriorated, with non-state armed groups stepping up attacks while government forces were busy enforcing COVID-19 response measures. There had recently been attacks on humanitarian hubs, which was a new phenomenon.
256. In the Sahel region, across Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, insecurity had also increased, fuelled by a looming economic crisis as measures put in place to slow the spread of COVID-19 affected agriculture and communities' capacity to feed themselves. Food prices had stabilized after rising significantly but remained above pre-lockdown levels. The region was seeing an alarming increase in tension and conflict, with non-state armed groups emboldened and intensified attacks and abductions across the region, including recently on the border with Côte d'Ivoire, raising concerns of spillover. Groups were also rumoured to be using COVID-19 as an opportunity to recruit in communities feeling the effects of the pandemic.



257. Inevitably, malnutrition in children under 5 was rising alarmingly as a result: a joint analysis with UNICEF estimated that the number of children under 5 with acute malnutrition in 2020 across the Sahel and in Senegal would rise to 5.4 million, up from an earlier estimate of 4.5 million.
258. WFP had scaled up its response in the region, increasing food assistance for the second half of 2020 by 40 percent and cash assistance by 46 percent to assist a total of 23 million people instead of the initial 13.5 million planned. A sizeable funding shortfall of USD 770 million was estimated for the second half of the year – 67 percent of the required USD 1.15 billion for West Africa.
259. The COVID-19 crisis nevertheless presented opportunities for a change in approach both by governments and WFP, with a better grasp of the need for system-strengthening to address the multi-layered crisis that risked growing hunger, deepening poverty and a reversal of development gains. Learning from COVID-19 required that first and foremost acute needs be addressed to protect lives and livelihoods. Efforts at strengthening communities' resilience also required bolstering. However, there was a need to pivot attention increasingly to support governments in strengthening national social protection systems and platforms, as well as food systems, making them more shock-responsive and enabling the scale, sustainability and preparedness required for the current and future shocks. In seizing the opportunity to address some of the root causes and enable systemic change, the regional bureau was supporting both government-led assistance for people affected by the lockdowns and increasingly responding to requests from countries across the region for technical assistance with regard to systems strengthening.

#### **Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia portfolio**

260. The Regional Director for the Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Africa and Central Asia said that 24 million in the region people had depended on WFP assistance before the COVID-19 pandemic, which had pushed an additional 9.4 million people into food insecurity. WFP's operations in the region accounted for more than 40 percent of its 2020 plan of work, with total requirements of USD 5.4 billion and a budget shortfall of USD 1.6 billion through the end of 2020.
261. In a region facing conflict, population displacement, economic strife, political uncertainty and the effects of climate change, the pandemic had hit hard. More than 600,000 cases of COVID-19 had been confirmed, nearly 23,000 people had died and the situation was likely to worsen. WFP staff had not been spared: three staff members in Yemen and one in the Sudan had lost their lives. The Regional Director expressed deep condolences for their families. WFP and its partners were disseminating hygiene messages and information on symptoms to beneficiaries, reducing the number of beneficiaries at each distribution site by staggering distributions and increasing their frequency and providing personal protective equipment for frontline workers. WFP monitoring teams were enhancing their remote monitoring capacity and increasing mobile data collection that allowed real-time tracking of prices and access to food.
262. To mitigate the effects of the pandemic, governments were establishing or expanding social protection programmes with technical, financial and operational support from WFP. In Iraq, for example, a doubling of the poverty rate to 40 percent was forecast, and WFP was working with the Government on the digitization of the public distribution system. Nearly half the population of the Syrian Arab Republic was food-insecure – 9.3 million people – and unless a United Nations Security Council resolution on cross-border operations was extended, 1.3 million people who depended on WFP food assistance would not be reached. In Lebanon, WFP planned to provide in-kind food assistance for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese people and was working with the Government and the World Bank on expanding the national poverty programme.

263. The deterioration of living conditions in Yemen was extremely worrying. If the situation persisted, an additional 7 million people already classified as food-insecure would need humanitarian aid, in addition to the 13 million WFP already assisted. In the State of Palestine, the unemployment rate had risen from 47 to 70 percent; WFP was providing cash-based transfers for 400,000 people and planned to reach another 65,000, while WFP school meals had been replaced by take-home rations and cash-based transfers for 4 million children and their households in nine countries. In Jordan, WFP was deploying mobile banking machines to facilitate the redemption of cash entitlements by beneficiaries. In Egypt, WFP was partnering with the Government on an innovation hub in Luxor with the aim of enhancing sustainable agriculture, improving food production and developing the green economy.
264. Noting that the pandemic was a global emergency that touched all Member States, the Regional Director appealed for continued support for WFP's work in the region and elsewhere.
265. Members extended condolences to the families and friends of the staff members who had lost their lives. They commended WFP for its relentless efforts in helping the people of the region, including its collaboration with the World Bank on social protection systems in many countries. Members offered to share their experiences and technological, logistics and financial support with WFP operations in the region. Emphasizing the need for sustainable solutions, one member requested additional information on the plans for enhancing analysis and approaches to crisis response that would facilitate donor funding decisions.
266. Thanking members for their support, the Executive Director said that in the face of currency devaluations WFP was working with governments to obtain preferential exchange rates for its cash-based transfers. WFP searched constantly for sustainable approaches to problems in the region, but many of those problems required political solutions. Once peace had been restored in areas of conflict, WFP would be more able to move from emergency to recovery mode.

### **Southern Africa portfolio**

267. The Regional Director for Southern Africa said that the COVID-19 pandemic was compounding deep-rooted challenges in the region, including high rates of malnutrition, inequality and HIV/AIDS; the effects of climate change were also particularly severe, with temperature rises of twice the global average and only one normal rainy season in the previous five years. In response to drought and prolonged lean seasons, WFP had distributed emergency food assistance for the first time for many years in some countries. Cyclones Idai and Kenneth had ravaged Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in 2019, and weather-related pest infestations were a growing threat. Extreme weather events were expected to increase food insecurity, which had already been affecting between 20 and 45 million people in the region each year.
268. The pandemic and its economic impact had left governments unable to make the necessary investments in social protection to address the effects of deepened and broadened hunger in the region. There were early indications that in the 12 Southern African countries where WFP had operations, between 42 and 52 million people would be food-insecure in the following 12 months. Rural areas would be hit particularly hard but the pandemic was also sparking much need in urban areas, and many national governments had requested WFP to launch shock-responsive urban assistance programmes.
269. Preparedness and early action were critical; WFP had taken advantage of good harvests in some countries of the region by using its Global Commodity Management Facility to procure 70,000 mt of food for pre-positioning at strategic locations. Food assistance for assets programmes were helping to improve community self-sufficiency in many countries, and work with governments was aimed at strengthening and expanding social protection systems. With the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic likely to outweigh and outlast the health impacts, more support for social protection was vital.

270. Throughout the pandemic WFP had sought to minimize the disruption of its operations. Personal protective equipment and office hygiene items had been dispatched to all country offices and sub-offices, and risk control measures were being introduced at distribution sites, with smaller and less frequent distributions aimed at reducing the need for large gatherings of beneficiaries, particularly in areas with high HIV prevalence. To mitigate the effects of school closures, WFP was providing take-home rations for 3 million children registered in its school feeding programmes.
271. There was a risk that the effects of the pandemic would fuel political instability and civil unrest and exacerbate existing conflicts, such as those in parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique. Gender-based violence had also surged alarmingly during the lockdowns imposed by governments to control the spread of the disease. Staff at all WFP locations were working to facilitate the reporting of alleged abuse via hotlines and WFP's mobile monitoring system, responding as soon as possible to allegations and referring them to other specialist United Nations agencies when appropriate. The risks posed by COVID-19 were particularly high for the many refugees and displaced people living in crowded and often unsanitary conditions throughout the region, but WFP's work with UNHCR to provide life-saving food assistance and sustainable solutions was hampered by funding shortfalls.
272. The funding shortfall for WFP operations in the region was USD 880 million for the coming six months; half of this amount was for WFP's pandemic response. Of particular concern was the food emergency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the largest in the world after Yemen. WFP had expanded its crisis response in the country and was working with FAO, UNICEF and other partners on a resilience building programme for 600,000 people, many of whom were women.
273. Members thanked the Regional Director for her comprehensive presentation and expressed appreciation for WFP's valuable work under her leadership.

#### **Latin America and the Caribbean portfolio**

274. The Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean underscored the seriousness of the COVID-19 crisis in the region, where 14.8 million people were confronting severe food insecurity. Operations faced huge funding shortfalls at a time of unprecedented need, with an estimated deficit of USD 328 million for the next six months. Food and cash-based assistance were required even where WFP used to provide technical assistance and capacity strengthening only, such as the Dominican Republic, Peru and the English-speaking Caribbean. WFP was also providing technical assistance in countries where it did not have a presence, such as Argentina.
275. Seven CSPs had been revised in response to COVID-19; WFP had adapted its programmes to respond to the crisis through school feeding take-home rations amid the mass closure of schools and through increased cash-based transfers in most of its programmes, with renewed emphasis in urban areas. The organization was also supporting governments by providing food assistance to quarantine or isolation centres in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru.
276. The situation of migrants was of particular concern because most were not covered by social protection systems; 2 million migrants were food insecure in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru alone. WFP and the Government of Colombia had launched an innovative pilot project to extend government social protection system coverage to migrants.
277. For the first time, WFP had flown food assistance to indigenous populations in the Colombian Amazon; WFP was also supporting indigenous populations affected by COVID-19 in Plurinational State of Bolivia, Peru, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala. In the Dry Corridor of Central America severe food insecurity was likely to persist until the September harvest. In the Caribbean, food insecurity had grown from 1 percent to almost 10 percent in the Dominican Republic, while many Cubans faced shortages of food, fuel and other goods due to the impact of COVID-19 on remittances and tourism. In Haiti, the pandemic had magnified

- the impact of drought and inflation on food insecurity, leaving almost 1.3 million people unable to meet their basic food needs.
278. The next hurricane season was forecast to be worse than average, threatening to exacerbate the challenges faced by many countries. El Salvador had already been affected by storm Amanda and WFP was in urgent need of funding to support the 203,000 people affected by both the storm and COVID-19, which exemplified the perfect storm. As part of its disaster preparedness WFP had pre-positioned food stocks in Haiti and Cuba, and in Barbados it was working with partners to pre-position non-food items.
279. WFP was also stepping up its social protection work by assisting governments in the design, targeting, monitoring and logistics of their own social programmes in order to adapt them and expand their coverage to populations in need. Despite the crisis, WFP continued to work to improve women's empowerment, nutrition and school-based programmes through strengthened partnerships with FAO, UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organization, the World Health Organization and other key partners in the region.
280. Board members underscored the multidimensional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated challenges related to inequality, slow economic growth, financial crises, extreme poverty, displacement and the triple burden of malnutrition. Several members praised WFP as a reliable and strategic partner to governments in tackling hunger, malnutrition and, most recently, the COVID-19 crisis.
281. Noting that the region received just 4 percent of the WFP programme budget and the lowest level of donor support, several members voiced deep concern over the 203 percent budget increase triggered by the pandemic, which demonstrated the continued need for WFP in the region. Recognizing the challenges in securing funding for operations in middle-income countries, they urged the international community to focus on the huge pockets of poverty and inequality that persisted in such countries, calling for long-term solutions and a commitment to sustainable development through approaches aligned with the triple nexus of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work.
282. The Regional Director thanked Board members for their support and commitment, suggesting that the Executive Board Bureau could explore additional ways for regional directors to share information on field matters with Board members.

### **Asia and the Pacific portfolio**

283. The Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific opened by describing the conditions in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, where 850,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar lived in cramped conditions with no mobile phone coverage and heavy restrictions on movement outside the camps. The 50 reported cases of COVID-19 were probably a small fraction of the actual number infected. Throughout the region well over 100 WFP staff members were on sick leave, many of them with COVID-19 symptoms, and two had lost their lives to the virus. While many governments had arrested the spread of COVID-19, case numbers in some South Asian countries had recently risen dramatically.
284. In response to the pandemic WFP was adapting existing programmes so as to maintain coverage while protecting beneficiaries, expanding programmes to meet new needs, supporting governments' responses and providing essential common services to partners. By providing two or three months of assistance at each distribution, WFP reduced the frequency of large gatherings of beneficiaries. Hygiene measures reduced the risk of contagion at distribution sites, and a switch from school meals to take-home rations in WFP school feeding programmes supported vulnerable children and their households during school closures – in Bangladesh, rations were even delivered to children's homes. In the Philippines, 350,000 households were registered on WFP's SCOPE platform so that they could receive government cash transfers. WFP's air service had transported 300 humanitarian and diplomatic personnel and delivered 16,000 cubic metres of medical and humanitarian cargo in Asia and was about to start operations in Pacific Island countries.

285. In recent months WFP had provided food assistance for 5.6 million people across the region – 70 percent of planned beneficiaries. It was exploring modalities for reaching the remaining 30 percent, scaling up its operations to reach an additional 5.2 million beneficiaries, and continuing to provide common services for governments and other partners. WFP employees were committed to meeting increased needs and many had worked solidly for several months without breaks. WFP had established new staff clinics in three countries, tripled the number of doctors in the regional medical office and doubled the number of staff counsellors to address the psychosocial effects of the pandemic.
286. The pandemic was expected to cause 175 million job losses in the region, pushing 52 million more people into extreme poverty and 22 million into acute hunger. Governments were rolling out stimulus packages and expanding social protection programmes, but many urgently required coordinated international support in addressing the triple threat of conflict, climate change and COVID-19. WFP was scaling up its operations to assist 10 million people in Afghanistan; complementing the Government’s social protection response by providing logistics services and food, cash-based and nutrition assistance for 1 million people in Pakistan; and using its digital registration platform to support the Government’s social protection system, scaling up the coverage of nutrition and school feeding programmes and providing relief food assistance for 50,000 returning migrants in Myanmar.
287. Board members commended the Regional Director and WFP staff for their work and extended their condolences to the families of the staff members who had lost their lives.
288. The Regional Director thanked the Board members for their support and responded to comments. In India, WFP was using experiences from other countries in the region to support the Government in adapting the national school feeding programme to the pandemic and school closures. In the Pacific subregion, WFP participated in a task force with the Pacific Island Forum and other local and international partners led by the World Health Organization and was working with telecommunications authorities in 22 countries, launching passenger and cargo air services for 25 countries and territories and working with partners on remote assessments in eight countries.

**Oral report on the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Office for Project Services, UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and WFP**

289. The President reported on the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Office for Project Services, UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and WFP, which had been held online on 29 May 2020. Members of the Executive Boards of the six agencies had participated and their principals had been present or represented. WFP Assistant Executive Director Ms Valerie Guarnieri had participated on behalf of the Executive Director, who was travelling, and the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations had participated on behalf of the Secretary-General. The meeting had been preceded by a “town hall” meeting on 21 April on the topic of COVID-19. As the meeting had been held remotely due to COVID-19 restrictions, the agenda had been reduced from a full day to a half day to take into account the time difference with Rome.
290. The main theme of the meeting was the reform of the United Nations development system in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In her address, Ms Guarnieri had drawn attention to the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, which had been forecast to double the number of people in acute food insecurity to 260 million; commonalities of health, humanitarian and development systems; and WFP’s provision of logistics and supply chain services, which she had described as “the backbone” of the United Nations system.

291. In his address, the President had commended the redoubling of efforts to work jointly throughout the United Nations system in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He had praised the strong focus on food security, food systems and the right to food in the United Nations humanitarian response plan, noting that the plan would inform preparations for the 2021 food systems summit and guide the discussions of the newly established informal group of friends of the summit set up by the Rome-based membership. He had called for greater streamlining of inter-agency coordination mechanisms such as the Development Coordination Office and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, for the elimination of “silos” in the United Nations system and for a broadening of partnerships to support the systematic inclusion of entities such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in United Nations inter-agency coordination efforts.
292. A report of the meeting was being translated and would be posted in all languages for the Board’s 2020 second regular session.

### **Oral update on United Nations Humanitarian Air Service**

293. The Chief of the Aviation Service gave an overview of WFP Aviation activities in 2019, when the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) had transported a record 400,000 passengers and 52,000 mt of cargo amid growing conflict and insecurity in Afghanistan, Libya, Nigeria and Yemen. The Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, cyclones and flooding in large swathes of Africa and growing sociopolitical unrest in Haiti were also factors in the increased demand for UNHAS services.
294. Despite operational challenges WFP Aviation had continued to focus on optimizing effectiveness and efficiency, achieving a small decrease in the operational cost per passenger kilometre. However, UNHAS load factors were inevitably lower than those of commercial operations due to the life-saving nature of the service, the need to prioritize responsiveness and effectiveness, seasonality and limitations on aircraft capacity due to airstrip conditions.
295. He then provided an update on progress in developing an environmental programme to reduce the carbon emissions of WFP aviation and on budgetary performance in 2019. He thanked donors for their contributions, which ensured that all humanitarian workers were able to reach the most vulnerable populations around the world.
296. In closing, he outlined the critical role of UNHAS in overcoming the disruption of global supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Operating out of nine hubs, it was providing a cargo service that covered 70 percent of the globe. Its passenger services reached 51 locked down countries, with over 400 flights performed on behalf of more than 180 organizations, mostly NGOs. He paid tribute to Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, Costa Rica and Egypt for opening their borders to accept critically ill COVID-19 positive patients who had been evacuated by UNHAS and the United Nations Department of Operational Support.
297. One Board member welcomed the presentation, emphasizing the crucial importance of UNHAS for the entire humanitarian community. Recalling recommendation 2 of the External Auditor’s report on aviation services, she urged WFP to include more data on cost, performance, environmental impact and operation funding modalities in WFP’s annual aviation report. She also encouraged WFP to deliver an annual presentation on air transport activities to the Executive Board and requested that the annual aviation report be submitted for Board consideration as a formal document starting with the Board’s 2021 annual session.
298. The Chief of the Aviation Service confirmed that the operational and financial details requested could be included in the annual report but suggested that a report specifically for the Board be prepared for that purpose to avoid the wide dissemination of such information. The President agreed to follow up on this suggestion and noted that the biennial programme of work of the Board would be updated accordingly.

**Oral update on preparations for the 2021 United Nations summit on food systems**

299. The Director of the Rome-based Agencies and Committee on World Food Security Division updated the Board on preparations for the 2021 United Nations food systems summit, expressing the full support of WFP and its sister agencies for the recently formed group of friends, which she said would ensure that collective feedback from the Rome-based agency members was passed directly to the Secretary-General's special envoy for the food systems summit.
300. Although COVID-19 had slowed preparations for the summit, WFP had seconded two staff members to the secretariat of the special envoy. The summit multi-donor trust fund was operational and recruitment for the secretariat was largely complete. Office space was being organized in Nairobi so that as soon as COVID-19 restrictions were lifted the special envoy and her team would be able to move in.
301. WFP looked forward to the advisory committee meeting scheduled for 7 July, which would be an opportunity for committee members to endorse the vision, objectives, action tracks and work streams for the summit. The Director assured the Board that WFP would work to ensure that the summit outcomes were actionable and would have a positive impact on food systems in all contexts, contributing to the achievement of the SDGs by 2030.
302. The President delivered a cross-List statement on behalf of the Board, welcoming the establishment of participatory governance bodies that would guide the summit preparations. The Board looked forward to receiving details of how those bodies would operate, particularly the advisory committee, the science group and the champions network, and underscored the importance of inclusive, effective and efficient interaction between all groups.
303. The Board described the group of friends as an important platform for the inclusive, regular and informal exchange of views on all aspects of the summit. It was designed to facilitate the participation of Rome-based agency members in the preparations for the summit, ensuring effective communication and coordination with the summit secretariat and other governance bodies.
304. The Board was keen to receive more information on the dates, locations and costs of the pre-summit meeting and the summit, including possible scenarios and mechanisms for the participation of Member States and public and private stakeholders. It also requested more details on the multi-donor trust fund.
305. The Board underscored the importance of setting an action-oriented outcome for the summit that would provide political impetus and support the achievement of the SDGs at the country level and said that the inclusion of the private sector, scientific networks and civil society would also be key to fostering innovative and evidence-based solutions for building more sustainable food systems.
306. The Board voiced its support for the vision set out by the special envoy of feeding the hungry and supporting the health of people and the planet. Describing the paradox of massive food waste and growing food insecurity, it called for urgent multisectoral action to establish resilient food systems that delivered safe, nutritious and sufficient food.
307. It emphasized the need to build on existing processes within the United Nations and other intergovernmental bodies such as the meetings of the governing bodies of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Committee on World Food Security and the World Trade Organization. It also called on WFP to contribute its valuable experience to the summit, harnessing the organization's comparative advantages in partnership with FAO, IFAD and other agencies.
308. Board members took the floor to call for the delivery of a similar cross-List statement at the next session of the FAO Council and to request another briefing by the special envoy on the action plan for the summit. One member, noting the interdependence of health, economic,

social and food systems, called on the international community to take a multidimensional approach to building resilient food systems that reflected the specific needs of each country.

309. The President clarified that the next meeting of the group of friends with the special envoy would take place on 14 July. A proposed agenda that addressed all the questions and comments of Board members had been shared with the special envoy. The Director added that while the trust fund was operational its structure and the areas requiring funding were still to be defined. All information would be handled by the summit secretariat, which was working on a platform and website for keeping Member States up to date on progress.

## **Summary of the work of the 2020 first regular session of the Executive Board**

### **2020/EB.A/27 Summary of the work of the 2020 first regular session of the Executive Board**

310. The President reported that the Rapporteur for the Board's 2020 first regular session had prepared the summary of that session and that a draft of it had been distributed to Board members in June 2020.

### **Verification of adopted decisions and recommendations**

311. Introducing the item the President highlighted the challenges presented by conducting a major meeting remotely through electronic means. While the challenges had been largely overcome, he endorsed the suggestion made by one member during the session that the Board and management discuss how to improve such meetings in the future. To that end he had begun to explore with the Secretary arrangements for an informal consultation on the matter.
312. The Rapporteur then confirmed that the decisions and recommendations presented in the draft compilation of decisions and recommendations adopted by the Board at the current session corresponded to those that had been agreed during the session. The final versions of the adopted decisions and recommendations would be posted on the Board's website the following week.



## ANNEX

## List of participants

## Liste des participants

## Lista de participantes

## قائمة بالمشاركين

**MEMBER STATES AND MEMBER NATIONS – EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS****ÉTATS MEMBRES – MEMBRES DU CONSEIL D'ADMINISTRATION****ESTADOS MIEMBROS – MIEMBROS DE LA JUNTA EJECUTIVA**

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## Acronyms

CAP	comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plan
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEWE	gender equality and women's empowerment
GHRP	global humanitarian response plan
GSS	global staff survey
HSHAPD	harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
MPTF	United Nations COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD-DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OEV	Office of Evaluation
OIG	Office of the Inspector General and Oversight Office
PACE	performance and competency enhancement
PSA	programme support and administrative
PSAEA	programme support and administrative equalization account
PSEA	protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UGSS	Union of General Service Staff
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework
WINGS	WFP Information Network and Global System