

برنامج
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Programme
Alimentaire
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World
Food
Programme

Programa
Mundial
de Alimentos

**Executive Board
Annual Session**

Rome, 24–26 May 2004

INFORMATION NOTES

REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR

Review of the World Food Programme's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping



Distribution: GENERAL

WFP/EB.A/2004/INF/8-B

18 May 2004

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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REPORT OF THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR ON THE REVIEW OF THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME'S VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS AND MAPPING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The World Food Programme (WFP) has to make the best use of donors' contributions in maximising support and deploying limited funds to best effect in the face of challenging circumstances and conflicting priorities. In these circumstances, reliable needs assessment is important for informed decision making and prioritisation of the use of funds. Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) is one of the key elements in the targeting and planning of food aid intervention.
2. As part of their audit visits to the field and at Rome headquarters, my staff examined the role of VAM and the way in which it is applied to support the Programme's targeting of food aid interventions. Their findings confirmed the value of VAM as an assessment process and decision tool but noted that WFP still lacks a wholly effective strategy for using the work of VAM to best effect. The audit review identified aspects where I believe there is scope for WFP to improve the way in which vulnerability analysis is used by the organisation.
3. Based on these findings, I have made a number of recommendations, in particular towards improvement of the effectiveness and benefits of vulnerability analysis; ensure the cost-effectiveness of VAM methodologies; expand the role of headquarters VAM staff; achieve a sounder funding base for VAM; and develop measurable targets against which the performance of the VAM procedures can be evaluated.

INTRODUCTION

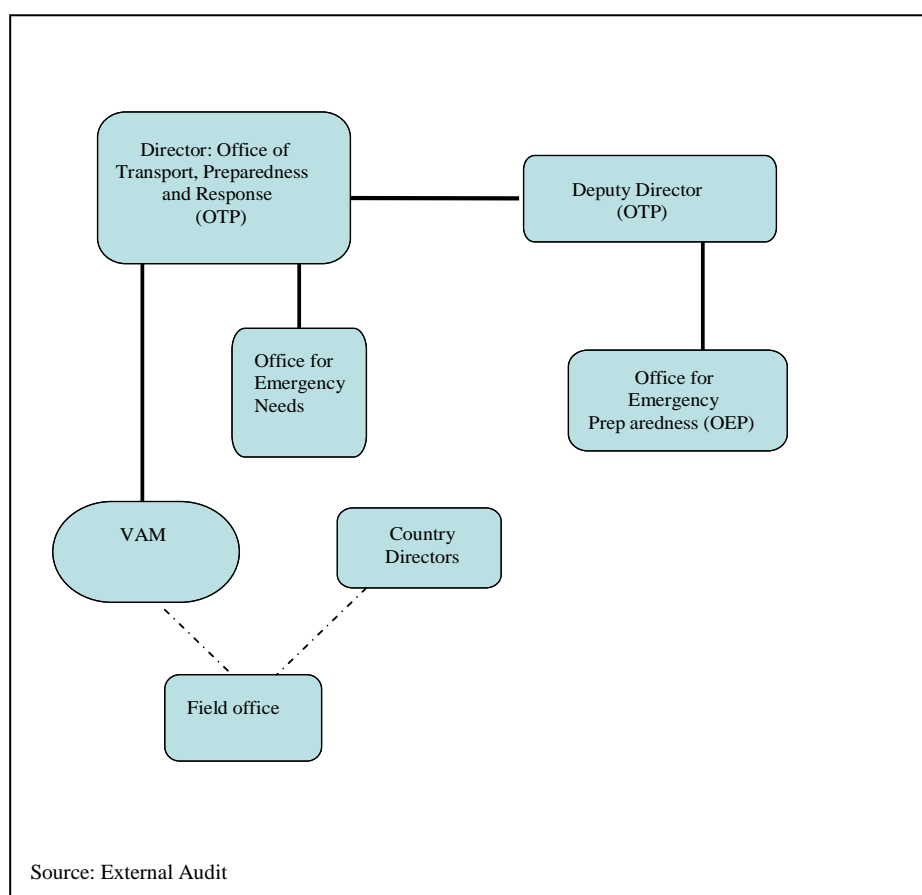
4. The World Food Programme has established a core programme goal, to contribute to meeting the United Nations Millennium Development Goals through food-assisted interventions targeted on poor and hungry people. At strategic plan level, WFP has identified an operational focus on Least Developed Countries, defined as a product of their gross domestic product and rates of malnutrition as calculated by the World Bank and the World Health Organization. The strategic plan identifies a need to provide WFP with a strengthened knowledge base through the development of vulnerability analysis to establish the need for food assistance intervention. Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) is the tool developed to provide this knowledge base.
5. VAM is intended to link the analysis of vulnerability of a developing country with WFP's programme strategy to address food insecurity. VAM is therefore a key tool for the design of WFP development and relief activities and projects. Its primary functions are:
 - Problem analysis: understanding the probable causes of food insecurity and vulnerability existing at any given time in a particular geographic region or population group;
 - Beneficiary analysis: determining the characteristics of food insecurity in vulnerable populations, and whether food assistance can improve their conditions;
 - Geographical targeting: assessing the degree of food security of specified geographic areas so that WFP can determine where to prioritise further analysis and response;
 - Assessing the role of food aid: identifying whether the use of food aid has a comparative advantage in addressing the basic causes of food insecurity and vulnerability in a target population; and



- Advocacy for the hungry poor: assisting the hungry poor by accurately representing their conditions to others who may be able to provide assistance.
6. VAM assists the Programme in identifying where to target its relief operations. VAM also assists WFP in achieving the strategic priority necessary to help governments establish and manage national food-assistance programmes. WFP vulnerability assessment reports are used in the humanitarian community as planning tools by host governments in preparing their annual plans; and by other UN agencies, such as the FAO, to target their operations. This help is limited, however, as VAM only produces results in countries where WFP currently operates and, more crucially, is often restricted to specific locations where programmes already exist. VAM analysis and active partnerships with implementing partners and host governments can inform WFP in its strategic planning for the reduction of food intervention and in assessing when the need for WFP operations in a location or country comes to an end.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

7. Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping represents one of three units that provide information to WFP management for operational awareness and decision making and is complemented by Emergency Needs Assessment (OEN) and Emergency Preparedness (OEP). Each of these units has its own role in supporting the operational direction of the organisation. The aim of all three units is to provide information which allows management to determine whether food aid intervention is required in response to disasters, shocks and emergencies. The VAM unit is the only one of the three that has a permanent field presence and provides baseline data from its surveys on which OEN and OEP can build in their respective areas of work.



8. Currently two of the three units report to the Director of Transport and the third to the Deputy Director for Transport (see figure above). There is a certain degree of interdependency between the units for the provision of data in WFP's programming cycle. VAM is the unit that provides baseline data from which the impacts of emergencies and shocks can be measured by the work of the other two units; and there is therefore a strong need for close liaison and cohesion.
9. To be effective, the VAM reports need to be able to identify the root cause of the vulnerability of food; and to provide assessments on the likely scale and nature of the impact that action by WFP might have. The Programme's strategic plan for 2002-03 recognised the need to improve needs assessment through better integration of the variety of units deployed in data collection and knowledge enhancement, although this was deferred until the 2004-05 because of the volume of emergency work during the biennium.

APPLICATION OF VULNERABILITY ANALYSIS AND MAPPING

10. The role of the VAM staff at headquarters is to establish guidance which standardises methodology and approach across the organisation for the production and analysis of VAM work. VAM staff in the field are tasked principally with carrying out surveys, collating data and analysing results. The present staffing structure of VAM places emphasis on the field activities, with five staff in headquarters supporting 38 staff in the field, based in WFP's Regional Bureaux and country offices. In smaller country offices, the role of vulnerability analysis occupies only part of the time of one member of staff, usually combined with the role of logistics officer or programme officer. My staff's examination of VAM activities in the field indicated that this arrangement can lead to the work of vulnerability analysis and mapping being under-resourced, since emergency-orientated tasks such as immediate food assessment and delivery are given necessary precedence over analysis work.
11. The Iraq conflict illustrates the application of VAM in the preparation for emergencies.



Preparing for the Iraq conflict

The VAM unit based in Cairo covering the Mediterranean, Middle East and Central Asia region carried out an assessment of vulnerability prior to the conflict in Iraq, to alert WFP to the potential operational capacity requirements. The nature of this emergency was unique in that WFP had time to assess the situation prior to the outbreak of hostilities.

VAM assessment examined the current situation where, with no effective economy in Iraq, the whole population of some 24 million was being fed by the WFP from food purchased under the UN resolution covering Oil for Food. WFP had the role of monitoring distribution in the 15 provinces of central and southern Iraq, where food is distributed by the local authorities. In the remaining three provinces in the north (population about 3 million), WFP had full access and were running the programme directly.

Lack of proper access to the southern and central provinces made it very difficult to achieve any sort of vulnerability assessment. In the north, WFP staff had some information from their other activities. To assemble more data, national observers in the south and central region were asked to make an assessment of the level of poverty and hunger based on their experience and judgement, since the circumstances precluded a more scientific basis for assessment.

WFP did not know if, or when, a conflict would start, or on what scale. Their planning was based on a number of assumptions agreed in negotiations with other UN humanitarian bodies.

WFP analysis was directed at assessing where the population was located and the most likely areas of emergency conditions and migration. WFP's criteria addressed rural and urban populations; and proximity to military installations, royal palaces and borders with neighbouring countries. Probable migration paths and the likely numbers of people affected by the resulting emergency were plotted on the assumption that military installations and palaces would be affected before cities.

WFP estimated some 300,000 refugees moving into neighbouring countries and about 4.6 million being affected in country, of which 0.6 million would be displaced. WFP estimated that at worst some 10 million people could be affected.

Based on this assessment, WFP predicted the volume and location of food requirements. Some food, such as pulses and oil, was then stockpiled in neighbouring countries to cope with the expected migration. It was considered that neighbouring countries selling food at the time would meet additional needs and contract negotiations were taken forward with Syria to provide the large quantities of wheat needed.

12. The work of VAM at headquarters and in the field over the past biennium has been principally working alongside or in support of operations providing assessments to assist in the direction of existing programmes. At the time of my audit, neither headquarters nor the Bureaux - with the exception of the Regional Bureau in Kampala (ODK) - maintained a database of VAM reports. My staff asked the Regional Bureaux to prepare a list of VAM reports for the 2002-03 biennium and to comment on the involvement of headquarters in the report process. Table 1 shows the number of reports prepared and the extent to which VAM staff at headquarters had been involved in or aware of the respective studies. (No response was received from two Regional Bureaux, in Panama and Cairo.)



TABLE 1: INVOLVEMENT OF THE VAM UNIT AT HEADQUARTERS IN REGIONAL AND COUNTRY REPORTS			
Bureau	Reports prepared	Reports reflecting Headquarters involvement	
Bangkok	29	0	0%
Cairo	N/A	N/A	N/A
Dakar	19	19	100%
Johannesburg	41	17	41%
Kampala	39	2	5%
Panama	N/A	N/A	N/A
	128	38	

Source: returns from Regional Bureaux

13. Further analysis by my staff indicated that the scope of the reports was in most cases limited to aspects of vulnerability assessment rather than analysis. While this assists management in assessing the quantitative need for food aid intervention, it does not necessarily provide information to assess the long term qualitative needs in the locations or countries reviewed. For example, of 39 VAM reports issued during 2003 by the East and Central Africa region and its associated country offices, 24 related solely to food security assessment. My staff noted a similar position in other regions that provided responses. The absence of an overall database for reports makes the comparison of the types of reports issued, the types of methodologies applied and their results difficult to analyse across the countries in which VAM is utilised. It may also give rise to inefficiencies in planning approaches, rendering the discussion of common problems and the dissemination of good practice more difficult than would otherwise be possible.
14. Where a comprehensive vulnerability analysis has been carried out, the resulting data offers a benchmark against which to measure progress and improvements at the country level. A complete database, allowing comparison of vulnerabilities between countries and providing a basis from which to build programme proposals, would assist in the decision making process for fund raising efforts by focusing WFP resources into emphasising specific appeals.

Recommendation 1. To improve the effectiveness and benefits of the analyses carried out, I recommend that WFP improve knowledge management through systematic collation and dissemination of the information and good practice gained from VAM studies.

15. In the past three years, the VAM unit at headquarters has responded to requests for assistance from regional directors by preparing comprehensive analysis in relation to only eight countries: Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Cape Verde, Malawi, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Seven of these eight countries are in regions where the established VAM unit has only limited capacity. The reports formulated with headquarters input utilised a framework adopted following a pilot study, and set a standard for country offices to follow. The headquarters VAM unit was involved in focused studies for a further 30 reports in regions without an established VAM presence, and also in Southern Africa where the regional emergency required significant staff input.



16. The VAM unit performs two roles in assisting country offices: firstly through vulnerability analysis, which reviews the need for food within a country and identifies whether WFP has a role to play with food aid intervention; and secondly through vulnerability assessment, which appraises food security issues and assists in targeting food aid to those in need. In some instances, the vulnerability assessment may identify risks to food security for a given population, while the analysis of the issues behind the risk may indicate that WFP does not have an intervention role to play. In such circumstances, VAM is complemented by the emergency needs and emergency preparedness units, which are called in to action in specific circumstances.
17. WFP's standard approach in carrying out an analysis is to review available secondary data - that which is readily available from the national government and non-governmental organisations in situ – in order to map where vulnerability is likely to occur. This review is reinforced the collection of primary data, usually using household surveys, and by early warning systems provided by the FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System and USAID's Famine Early Warning System.
18. Decisions on where to conduct primary data collection surveys are based on initial analysis by the VAM officer and judgements on the indications of vulnerability from secondary data. The data collated consists of subjective indicators (such as disposable income) and empirical results (for example malnutrition and stunting rates). Subsequent analysis of this data and its translation into useful management information involves the exercise of judgement and experience by VAM officers.
19. This approach is useful as a proxy indication for assessing the degree of vulnerability in a given population, though it is not definitive since poor secondary data may skew the focus of the primary study. For example, in situations involving internally displaced people or refugees, the use of secondary data is less effective, because irregular population movements require constant updating of base data. In Angola, where a careful and considered review of the role of VAM has been conducted by the local staff, limitations on the reliability of data have been acknowledged. Limitations that have been identified by the Programme include the following:
 - Where large populations of internally displaced people are moving spontaneously, reliable estimates of the numbers of beneficiaries in areas of food insecurity are difficult to determine;
 - Data on the health and nutrition status of a population is based on the institution that collects the data, rather than the population concerned. This data does not reflect where patients live and therefore may bias the targeting of Programme action;
 - In areas inaccessible to humanitarian groups, reliance is placed on information gathered by local traders, military or church leaders;
 - Data on income and coping strategies is limited and time sensitive.
20. A weakness with secondary data is that it is usually out of date due to the time and resources needed to collect and collate it. For example, surveys conducted by WFP in Northern Iraq in 2003 relied on data collected by UNICEF and FAO between 1998 and 2000 to assist targeting. However, the costs and time involved in the collection and collation of primary data is much higher than that associated with the use of secondary data. My staff noted that the cost/benefit relationship in collecting up to date information from independent sources was not always examined by WFP when collating primary and secondary data for VAM studies. If assurance can be taken from reliable sources of secondary data, the costs in monetary terms and in the time taken to obtain primary data would be defrayed.



Recommendation 2. I recommend that, at the beginning of VAM studies, WFP assess the relative cost benefits of using primary and secondary data.

21. Notwithstanding the limitations on the reliability of data (in terms of age and relevance), they do not rule out the use of VAM as a valid analytical tool for WFP. In such instances, VAM is used in conjunction with other information, such as local knowledge, when analysing whether food aid intervention is required and assessing where to target food aid. The establishment of a benchmark database in association with an assessment of the reliability of data from other, secondary, sources could help to filter information and safeguard against the need to resort to unnecessary collection of primary data.
22. The quality of the interpretation of data is dependent on the training and capacity of the staff undertaking the analysis work. WFP have staff specifically trained for this role in the VAM unit in headquarters and in some country offices. However, their use and involvement elsewhere relies on requests from country offices. The success of VAM studies at a national level depends on the capacity of the local VAM unit and WFP's VAM work plan for 2003 included a review of capacity in the field. Training assessments of national and junior professional officers identified weaknesses in their data analysis skills; and a survey conducted in support of preparing the Programme's Emergency Needs Assessment guidelines identified a need for training in generic assessment skills rather than just vulnerability assessment.
23. The present technical capacity of WFP staff in the field does not readily support statistical analysis and extrapolation, especially where VAM is carried out by staff who are not dedicated exclusively to VAM work. During an audit visit to Colombia, for example, my staff noted that household questionnaire surveys had not incorporated weightings for the questions included in the survey, implying that each question had an equal impact on the assessed vulnerability. They also noted that the selection of households for survey was not statistically sound, in that the selection of districts and villages had been based on the indications of secondary data which was not up to date.
24. At a national level, VAM is seen as a programme support mechanism and has been developed as a field tool rather than as an activity directed from headquarters. This has led offices to develop in different ways with different emphases. For example, the Southern Africa region prepared regular rolling assessments in conjunction with other partners, focusing on analysis; whereas most reports prepared by the Asia Bureau concentrated on assessment and the geographical targeting of resources. While this is useful to cover the variety of issues that arise in each region, it illustrates the importance of headquarters taking responsibility for quality control and for ensuring the relevance of the reports and methodology used.
25. At present there is no formal requirement within WFP for country offices to seek input from VAM headquarters or the regional bureaux for guidance on the implementation of VAM studies. There is currently no mechanism in place to implement quality control of studies produced or to encourage the field to involve headquarters in their surveys. It may be the case, therefore, that the established capacity and skills available in the headquarters VAM unit could be more fully utilised in this respect.
26. The quality control role of the VAM unit at headquarters is not clearly defined within the current framework of arrangements. The headquarters VAM unit operates on an ad hoc basis and is dependent on being involved at the initial stages of an analysis to check that proposed approaches are in line with established methodologies. Early involvement, and an oversight of quality, would help establish a more consistent and therefore reliable approach to VAM generally; and allow for more effective and useful comparative analysis. Consistent quality can enhance the reputation and utility of VAM studies, both within and



outside WFP. My staff found that, in some cases, the information collated for their audit on reports prepared during the biennium represented the first time that the VAM unit at headquarters had been aware of the existence of some of the reports and papers.

27. In the absence of substantive quality controls from an established headquarters unit to ensure that the appropriate methodology is applied to individual studies, and that the evaluation of data is reliable, there may be an increased risk of efforts being misinterpreted or misdirected. Improved quality control will ensure consistency of standards and the application of appropriate methodology to the VAM process.

Recommendation 3. I recommend that WFP strengthen the role and use of the VAM unit in headquarters, to provide advice and quality control in all VAM studies.

Recommendation 4. I also recommend that WFP establish arrangements to ensure that feedback from local surveys is channelled through the VAM unit in headquarters, so that best practice may be identified, promoted and incorporated into training courses, manuals and the VAM website.

PARTNERSHIPS

28. In September 2000 WFP, with other partners in the international humanitarian community, committed itself to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which among other things, included reducing hunger by half by the year 2015. The indicators against which performance will be measured are:
- the prevalence of underweight in children under 5 years of age; and
 - the proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption.
29. FAO's report "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2003" identified where the hungry of the world are located, showing that more than 60 per cent are in the Asia and Pacific region. This differs notably from where WFP target their food aid based on the Least Developed Country criteria since, over the past four years, only 30 per cent of WFP operations have been focused on Asia and the Pacific. This lack of correspondence reflects the difficulty WFP have in matching their role in using food aid intervention to prevent chronic crisis with that of the Millennium Development Goal of halving hunger by 2015. This also highlights where WFP can target advocacy and raise the issue of the hungry poor with other agencies or partners; and influence the focus of their operations towards working together to meet Millennium Development Goals.
30. WFP's focus of operations tends to be in the more rural and isolated areas of countries, while partners from other UN agencies have a greater presence in urban areas. The two areas of expertise complement each other in drawing up an overview for a particular region. The benefits of joint operations include better coverage; more cost effective and efficient use of resources; and a broader view of issues. For example, in Afghanistan a survey was carried out between July and September 2002 involving 19 agencies/NGOs, two local university agricultural faculties and the co-operation of the national government, with WFP leading the project. The number of parties involved enabled a comprehensive review of food security for the first time of all 329 Districts of the country. Unfortunately the review also exemplified one of the weaknesses of joint operations: that the report was limited to determining food needs and did not address whether food aid intervention was required. Nor did it address internally displaced populations and nomadic communities or returnees, which are the more complex and difficult groups to analyse.



31. Angola has a WFP country office with a well developed VAM unit, where the partnership with other agencies and NGO's is well established but differs from that adopted in Afghanistan. In Angola, WFP direct the whole operation keeping the focus clearly on WFP's objectives and using NGO's for the express purpose of data collection over a wide area. The methodology has been carefully considered and documented; and training has been given to the partners, to ensure that their staff on the ground understand what WFP requires. The analysis is carried out by WFP staff and is regularly reviewed and updated. Comprehensive quarterly VAM reports are published by the country office for use by all humanitarian organisations in the country. My staff noted that the country office had developed a capacity building program to enable field staff and implementing partners to better understand and use food security information.
32. The scale of the emergency in Southern Africa demanded a different approach by the humanitarian community, where a Vulnerability Assessment Committee of national professionals working together at a regional level was established. In August 2001, Ministers of Agriculture from within the Southern Africa Development Community encouraged member states to establish cross-sectoral and inter-agency vulnerability assessment groups to better understand and target intervention.
33. There are potential gains for WFP from partnerships organised amongst a cohesive group of similarly orientated organisations and partners. Where there are many partners or no clear methodologies, the likelihood of successful information from studies is diminished.

Recommendation 5. I recommend that WFP ensure the availability of timely, consistent and reliable information, through an established VAM methodology, to all parties for the support of operations and to monitor the need for food aid intervention.

FUNDING

34. Funding for VAM reports is provided either as part of a project, in which case the costs are recorded as direct support costs, or from donor grants or trust funds. The amount of funding available for management to meet needs which are not directly targeted or specified by donors (multilateral contributions) has remained relatively static at about \$360 million a year over the past four calendar years. Much of the funding that WFP receives has been directed by donors towards specific country programmes and appeals. Table 2 refers.

TABLE 2: BREAKDOWN OF FUNDING BY FUND TYPE				
	2000	2001	2002	2003
	\$ m	\$ m	\$ m	\$ m
Bilateral	N/A	57.3	45.6	1,193.5
Directed Multilateral	N/A	1,542.5	1,479.8	2,245.6
Multilateral	359.9	371.0	381.0	367.0
Source: WFP RMS as at 12 January 2004				



35. The restrictions associated with the use of bilateral and directed multilateral funding underline the importance of effective targeting of resources and the relevance of VAM in providing information for decision makers at global and national level.
36. VAM is funded primarily funded from within existing country programmes, though some bilateral sources are made available. The inclusion of VAM within a programme establishes a certain degree of conflict with the role of determining whether food-assisted intervention is required in the first instance. However, unless funding is made available separately, this represents the only means of financing VAM work. The arguments in favour of the existing approach are that it also provides a benchmark against which to monitor the impact of intervention; and guidance in redirecting the thrust of an operation during its lifetime. It also brings benefits in signalling an exit strategy, by showing the changing role of food aid intervention.
37. The work plan for the VAM unit in Rome for 2003 set a target of updating 8 to 10 baseline assessments and supporting 4 to 5 emergency needs assessment surveys, to be funded using Programme Support and Administration (PSA) resources. The work plan was not based on any risk assessment and, given the limited funding available outside programme budgets, it did not address the establishment of a vulnerability database from which to benchmark performance.
38. The main financial challenge facing vulnerability analysis is to obtain funding to enable the analysis to take place before a decision to establish a programme is made. This is particularly relevant for analysis at a global level and in the context of building a benchmark database from which to prioritise operations and measure performance. WFP's management plan for 2004-2005 includes financial support to strengthen the Programme's knowledge base and improve needs assessment.

Recommendation 6. I recommend that WFP review the adequacy of the funding arrangements for VAM against its context as a strategic and management priority in strengthening the organisation's knowledge base and advocacy of food-assisted intervention.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

39. WFP's 2004 – 2007 Strategic Plan includes a performance results matrix to help WFP focus on critical results derived from its activities. The matrix identified outputs and outcomes for each of the five strategic priorities in terms of qualitative rather than quantitative performance indicators. The organisation's results-based management initiative supports the strategic priorities by co-ordinating the focus of each division to a common aim and measuring its impact. WFP's Results-Based Management Orientation Guide, issued in November 2003, recognises the need to set measurable targets against project objectives; and the need to define measurable outputs and desired outcomes for each project. Performance indicators published in the Programme's management plan identify response time as a key indicator but do not address issues such as quality of products or whether the right study is undertaken.
40. Measurement of the impact of VAM as an output or outcome is difficult given the wide range of factors outside WFP's control that can influence vulnerability. A useful measure of VAM at the strategic level would be achievement against the Millennium Development Goals over the medium term, to demonstrate whether WFP is identifying and taking action where the hungry people are identified. The operational environment in which WFP works is very complex and the failure to end an emergency in a given time period may not reflect well against performance indicators. However, VAM studies can help in understanding the contributory factors that necessitate the need for continued food-assisted intervention.



41. At a national level VAM is used to endorse or refocus current programmes. The success of VAM is again difficult to measure and the Results Based Management initiative has yet to agree outputs and outcomes for VAM activity. Using key indicators such as mortality rate or malnutrition rates would not necessarily reflect the impact of VAM, although these could be indirectly linked to, or influenced by, VAM action over time. In addition, a VAM recommendation against food aid intervention may be measured as a success if no crisis arises within a given timeframe.

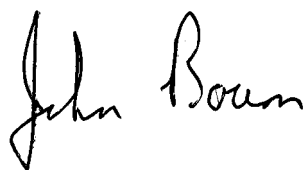
Recommendation 7. I recommend that WFP develop measurable targets against which the performance of VAM can be judged, so that the data collected by VAM can establish a benchmark against which the operational success of WFP may be measured.

CONCLUSION

42. At present WFP lacks an effective strategy for using the work of VAM proactively for prioritising or measuring the work of the organisation. At a national level VAM is predominantly being used to refocus existing programmes (from which VAM is currently funded) and for supporting proposals for extensions to existing programmes.
43. Where a comprehensive vulnerability analysis has been performed, the resulting data establishes a benchmark against which to measure the improvements within a country. A complete database of such studies would allow WFP to undertake a comparison of vulnerability across countries and form a foundation from which to build strategic programme proposals. This would assist in the decision making process; in enhancing strategic direction; and for fund raising efforts by focusing WFP resources into emphasising specific appeals.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

44. I wish to record my appreciation for the co-operation and assistance provided by the Executive Director and the staff of the Programme during the audit.



Sir John Bourn
Comptroller and Auditor General, United Kingdom
External Auditor

