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INFORMATION NOTES

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS' VISIT TO EGYPT



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INTRODUCTION

1. From 17 to 23 June 2000, a delegation of WFP Executive Board representatives undertook a mission to Egypt, where WFP has three ongoing food-for-work development projects. The mission comprised the following Board Members: Bangladesh, Finland, Haiti, Madagascar, Morocco, Peru, Romania and Saudi Arabia; the representative of Italy participated in her capacity as Observer. The delegation was guided and assisted by WFP staff from the Cairo office. The list of participants and persons met is provided in Annex I. The programme of the visit is attached as Annex II.
2. The purpose of the visit was to give participants an opportunity to see for themselves how food aid in development was working in the field. As preparations for an extension of the Egypt Country Programme were under way, the mission and the experiences/impressions gained by the team could represent a link when the Country Programme is presented and discussed at the Executive Board in October 2001.

KEY MEETINGS: GOVERNMENT OF EGYPT AUTHORITIES, UNITED NATIONS AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES, BILATERAL DONORS, NGOS

3. The delegation met with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, and the Governor of Aswan, senior officials and project staff from the Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation (MALR) as well as from the Mubarak Scheme. Before the field visit, the team also met with WFP staff members and other United Nations agency representatives in Cairo, as well as representatives of bilateral donors.
4. The programme started with a meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Land Reclamation. The discussion focused on the importance of WFP food aid in new settlements, where farmers are still far from being self-sufficient. In this connection, the Minister stressed the Government's priority of making new land available for farming and the settling of landless people on newly reclaimed land, thus providing more agricultural opportunities.
5. The mission also met with the representatives of the Hope Village Society, an NGO based in Cairo. In addition, it visited two homes, one for boys and one for girls. These homes provide street children a shelter, an education and a chance to get a start for a better life. Street children use drugs and are vulnerable to sexual abuse; many of them suffer from HIV/AIDS. The NGO also helps the children return to their parents and families, which according to information given to the team, was easier to accomplish for boys than for girls.

WFP AND EGYPT

6. As a low-income, food-deficit country, with a per capita gross national product in 1998 of US\$1,290, Egypt is eligible for WFP assistance. Uneven income distribution is a problem; about 23 percent of the population lives on less than LE 840 (less than US\$250) a year, or 68 cents a day. In addition, a recent analysis of household survey data shows that 20 percent of the population (or about 13 million people) lives on less than the



minimum calorie requirement of 2,431 kcal a day recommended in a recent study by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Despite considerable efforts, a high proportion of the population is not benefiting from improvements in the country's economy.

7. Through its projects, WFP plays a catalytic role in introducing changes for alleviating poverty in Egypt. This change agent/enabling role is more significant than the assistance provided. WFP's input into a national project ensures that the Government (Parliament) accords development priority status in the Government's budget. WFP's cooperation with the Government apparently enables the financing of community development activities with an emphasis on participatory development, which is not the case for similar projects that are not assisted by WFP. This relates particularly to the changes that have been introduced for women. Women participating in WFP projects have achieved empowerment; they obtain birth certificates, identity cards, user rights to cultivate land, membership in local committees that make decisions for the future of their communities and, for the first time, they are able to take out loans thanks to the legal recognition accorded to them. The Government of Egypt is now considering replicating this initiative in other depressed areas of the country. WFP has also managed to persuade the Government to bring about a change in the targeting of resources in favour of the poorest people in Egypt.
8. Therefore, it can be said that so far Egypt is an eligible country according to the above-mentioned standards. The beneficiaries fit the hunger/poverty criteria, the Government makes significant policy changes following the introduction of new ideas; projects target the poorest, achieve objectives and are sustainable; and WFP works in parallel with a government already undertaking major efforts to assist the population.

FIELD VISITS

9. The WFP office in Cairo had set up visits to two project sites: the Lake Nasser project in Kalabsha and Garf Hussein (ARE 3214.01 - "Land Development and Settlement in the High Dam Lake Area" and ARE 5789.00 — "Settlement on Newly Developed Land in Waidi El Saaida"). The latter is part of the National Mubarak Scheme.
10. The Government's strategy aims at increasing food production, through vertical and horizontal agricultural development; the latter involves reclamation of "new land" in the desert areas. The WFP Country Programme for the period 1998-2001 concentrates on land settlement schemes in reclaimed desert areas. In order to understand the differences between the two projects' "ideologies"—even if both have similar objectives (installing landless farmers and female-headed households on new lands and rendering them sustainable producers of food for themselves and for sale)—it is necessary to look into the agricultural policies of the Government of Egypt.

Land Policy and the Mubarak Scheme

11. The Government of Egypt has invested a lot for gaining land from the desert and providing it to the landless with the aim of reducing overpopulation in the Nile Valley. As Egypt has to import almost half of its food requirements, the agriculture and food sector is crucial in the Government's policies and fundamental for any political action.
12. The National Mubarak Scheme for Settlement was initially established in the early 1980s for the settlement of graduates. Until recently, it was known as the National Mubarak Project for Graduates. Over the past two years the WFP-supported parts of the



Mubarak Scheme were reformulated to include only landless settlers, thus reflecting a recent shift in government policy, which previously had favoured the provision of land to unemployed graduates of universities and technical schools.

Visit to the Lake Nasser Project (ARE 3214.01)

13. This project, located in the foreshore area of the High Dam Lake, is in its second phase which started in 1997. The project participants receive WFP and Government assistance in order to settle by building their own houses as well as developing and farming reclaimed land. Lake Nasser supplies the water needed for irrigation systems. This project differs from the other project under the Mubarak Scheme in that it promotes micro-initiatives based on self-help patterns.
14. The mission visited the health centres, the school, the farming area and the farm storage facilities of the villages of Kalabsha and Garf Hussein. The team could not observe any farming activities, as it was post-harvest season. The monitoring of food taken from the storage seemed to function well.

Visit to the Wadi el Saaida Project, Mubarak Scheme (ARE 5789.00)

15. The team visited two villages - Amr Ibn El Aas and El Iman. They visited a home, a farm, a day-care centre and the warehouse, and spoke with the project beneficiaries about their problems.
16. The mission found the area to be very impressive and the project site much larger than that of the Lake Nasser project. The housing standard was also higher, as the Government had constructed the houses and infrastructure as well as several canals and pump stations to cover the irrigation needs of the whole area. A large number of people were reported to be waiting for their turn for inclusion in the project which was impeded by a lack of facilities and resources. The Government is placing emphasis on female-headed households; so far, around 16 percent of the settlers are female-headed households and one fifth of the land allocated to each male-headed household is in the wife's name.
17. The mission observed that in both projects poor people settled in project areas were making progress towards integrated and sustainable improvement of their socio-economic conditions. The emphasis on empowering women through access to land rights and non-farm income-earning opportunities was evident. The strict monitoring of project activities discouraged leakage of resources. However, discussion with some of the beneficiaries revealed that the land area allocated to each family was too small to allow production of sufficient quantities of food for consumption and marketing.

OBSERVATIONS

18. As already mentioned, Egypt is a low-income, food-deficit country which imports nearly half of its food requirements. Lack of an industrial base, coupled with a vast spread of unproductive desert lands, keeps development potential limited basically to agriculture along the Nile Valley and investments on social development. The export performance of some cash crops such as cotton and horticultural products has not been encouraged by the recent liberalization and macro economic reforms under World Bank/International Monetary Fund programmes.
19. Poverty is widespread in Egypt, with high concentrations in Upper Egypt. Due to structural deficits in food production and low income levels, food aid plays an enabling



role during the first two to four years, until new land reaches a sufficient level of productivity.

20. The Government of Egypt is strongly committed to alleviating poverty and food insecurity in vulnerable groups. Discussion with other United Nations and bilateral donor agencies reveal that an enabling macro-economic environment as well as necessary institutional arrangements have already been put in place to pursue a people-centred development. Vulnerable groups are especially protected through a safety net; the Government has created a Social Development Fund for this purpose.
21. There is an ongoing debate in Egypt regarding the viability and long-term sustainability of horizontal expansion as opposed to vertical intensification of agricultural production in view of water scarcity in Egypt. Although vertical intensification would be desirable from a strictly economic standpoint, WFP's present involvement with horizontal expansion of production is justified from a broader socio-economic perspective. Besides helping landless and other disadvantaged groups to mainstream themselves into the economic lifeline, this policy has been instrumental in reducing population concentration along narrow strips of the river valley as well as ensuring social rights of the settler population.
22. WFP has good working relationships with the relevant Ministries. WFP deserves special credit for bringing in and supporting required changes in government policies towards distributing larger amounts of reclaimed lands to extremely poor, landless people.
23. Although the WFP Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Unit in Egypt is still working on finalizing various thematic maps on poverty and vulnerability, it seems that the two settlement projects are aimed primarily at resettling the landless and rural poor from Egypt's crowded traditional farming areas, with a particular focus on female-headed households. While WFP food aid reaches targeted beneficiaries to a large extent, further refinement in targeting is required in the case of the Wadi El Saaida project (5789.00). The WFP/VAM in Cairo has to face the challenge of incomplete statistical data when trying to improve and refine targeting mechanisms.
24. Women have been specifically targeted for assistance in all the projects where WFP is involved. There are designated gender focal points in both projects with a target of including at least 10 percent of beneficiaries from female-headed households. Girl's education and skills training for women in order to diversify their productive potentials are integral parts of the two projects. More importantly, the provision of one fifth of land rights to women has greatly contributed to improving the position of women in society. It was observed that this initiative would be worth emulating in other countries of the Middle East and North Africa Region.
25. Beneficiary participation is the hallmark of both projects. Settlers, through the creation of agricultural cooperatives, participate actively in all major decisions affecting their economic and social lives. In particular, freedom to decide on the use of inputs, outputs, pricing and marketing channels have made their participation truly meaningful. Their continued participation would be vital for the projects' long-term sustainability.
26. Although the projects make provision for education and health services in each village, it appears that there is need for upscaling both the quantity and quality of such services. When a settlement community is expanding, the servicing needs also expand. Here WFP could play a catalytic role in trying to intensify the Government's respective sector authority and/or specialized agency interest and involvement in stepping in to assist in strengthening health and education services in order to ensure the sustainability of the communities' livelihoods.



27. Monitoring was found to be very effective in both projects. Unfortunately, little effort was made to utilize the data collected to make any impact or allow an evaluation of outcomes. Although it was apparent that the projects were highly successful in alleviating poverty, lack of concrete data precluded drawing definitive conclusions regarding directions and trends, for instance, on the nutritional status of the settled population in general and women and children in particular.
28. The two projects were found to be broadly compliant with the Enabling Development policy as they strive to create a sustainable asset base for the poorest of the poor through the provision of food along with support to strengthen human capacity and empower women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

29. Much remains to be done to achieve the goal of a harmonized United Nations response to poverty alleviation in Egypt. The constitution of a Donor Assistance Group (DAG), of which WFP is an active partner, has provided an opportunity for policy coordination and synergy in approaching common problems, and the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) processes have enabled resources to be pooled for joint programming in related areas. In spite of these developments, actual cooperation in the field in the form of joint projects is still lacking. Except for the North-West Desert Resources Management project (ARE 5586.00), the other initiatives supported by WFP are stand-alone projects, although there are opportunities for close cooperation with FAO, IFAD, UNESCO, UNDP and others. Specially disconcerting was the absence of substantive cooperation among WFP, IFAD and FAO in the field in Egypt, despite their common mandate of working to alleviate food insecurity in the most vulnerable groups. This aspect of strategic cooperation must be given top priority in the next CP.
30. Although the current CP envisioned measuring socio-economic effects of the projects through participatory appraisal techniques based on baseline survey data, this has not been translated into practice. Given the lack of reliable data from other sources, it would be extremely difficult to assess project benefits in the absence of benchmark data. WFP needs to give serious attention to this.
31. Illiteracy in Egypt is quite high, at 45 percent. The preliminary findings of the VAM Unit identified illiteracy as a constant in the conditions of social and economic deprivation and food insecurity. Since the possibilities for vertical and horizontal expansion of agriculture in Egypt are limited, as are those of providing income transfer to the poorest through the creation of employment, one possible way of addressing poverty in Egypt might be through investments in social sectors such as education and health. Depending on the availability of resources in future, WFP, in conjunction with the Government and other United Nations partners like UNESCO, UNICEF and ILO, should support projects in depressed areas with the aim of improving the population's nutritional status and living conditions. Measures to assist poor children in urban areas in cooperation with ILO should also be given serious thought.



ANNEX I

**WFP EXECUTIVE BOARD FIELD MISSION TO EGYPT—
17 TO 23 JUNE 2000**

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND PERSONS MET DURING THE
MISSION**

Minister's Meeting—18 June 2000

H.E. Dr Youssef Amin Wali
Deputy Prime Minister & Minister of Agriculture & Land Reclamation
Ministry of Agriculture

Eng. Fouad Abou Hadab
Supervisor General of WFP Assisted Projects
Ministry of Agriculture

Mrs Suzan Kamel
Director
WFP-assisted projects ARE 2499.03 and 5789.00
Ministry of Agriculture

Donors' Meeting—18 June 2000

Mr George Mina, Australia
Ms Janis Sheltinga, Canada
Dr Erhard Voelzke, Germany
Mr Filippo Scammacca, Italy
Mr Liviu Iancu, Romania

Field Visit—19 to 21 June 2000

H.E. Kamel Ahmed Amer
Governor of Aswan

Eng. Mohamed Hamdy Tolba
Chairman of the High Dam Lake Development Authority
Executive Manager of WFP project ARE 3214.01 Lake Nasser
Member of the Board of WFP-assisted project 5789.00 Wadi El Saaida, Aswan

Eng. Mustafa El Sikini
Executive Director – Mubarak National Project Development of Land Reclamation

Eng. Saleh Mostafa Younis
Director of Agricultural Cooperatives for Reclaimed Lands

Eng. Mohamad Abbas
Supervisor General – Wadi El Saaida Reclaimed Area



Meeting with the United Nations agency representatives—22 June 2000

Mr Edmund J. Cain, Resident Coordinator
 Mr Nadir Hadj-Hammou, UNDP
 Mr Hamed Mobarak, UNDP
 Mr William Holaday, UNIDO
 Mr Aboubacry Tall, UNICEF
 Mr Nadir Doumandji, FAO
 Mr Wolfgang Schiefer, ODCCP
 Mr Robert E. Hindle, WB
 Mr Muhammad Rujwanullah, UNHCR
 Ms Shatha Al-Monthri, UNESCO
 Mr Hashem Al-Qudah, Universal Postal Union (UPU)

Meeting with the NGO/Visit to the Hope Village Society—22 June 2000

➤ *Street childrens centres in Seid el Zeinab (boys), Rhod el Farrag (girls)*

Mr Ashraf Mohamed Abd El Monem, General Director for Hope Village
 Mr Ahmed Abdel Fatah, Treasurer and Board Member of Hope Village
 Ms Hanam, Director, Rhod el Farrag Street Children's Centre
 Mr Mahmoud, Deputy Director, Rhod el Farrag Street Children's Centre

List of Participants

- List A** Madagascar (Mr Monja, Counsellor)
 Morocco (Mr Ahmed Afailal, Minister Plenipotentiary)
- List B** Bangladesh (Mr Mohammed Mejbahuddin, Counsellor)
 Saudi Arabia (Mr Bandar Al-Shalhoob, Alternate)
- List C** Peru (Mr Miguel Barreto, First Secretary)
 Haiti (Ms Suze Percy, Counsellor)
- List D** Finland (Ms Ulla-Maija Finskas, Minister Counsellor)
 Italy (Ms Rosa Anna Coniglio Papalia, First Counsellor)
- List E** Romania (Mr Ioan Pavel, Counsellor)



ANNEX II

PROGRAMME FOR VISIT OF EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS
TO WFP PROJECTS IN EGYPT
17 TO 23 JUNE, 2000

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Saturday 17 June | Arrival of Mission Members |
| Sunday 18 June | |
| 9.00 | Meet in Lobby of Conrad Hotel and go to WFP Cairo Office |
| 11.00 | Meeting with H.E. Youssef Wali, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture |
| 13.00 | Donors' Meeting in United Nations meeting room Fly to Aswan |
| Monday 19 June | |
| 8.00 | Visit to Project 3214.00 Lake Nasser |
| 16.00 | Visit to Project office in Aswan |
| 17.00 | Meet with Governor of Aswan (optional: visit Philae Temple in evening) |
| Tuesday 20 June | |
| 8.00 | Drive to Wadi El Saaida |
| 10.00 | Visit to Project 5789.00 Wadi El Saaida |
| 15.00 | Leave for Luxor |
| Wednesday 21 June | |
| 9.00 | Organized visit to historical sites |
| 16.00 | Fly back to Cairo |
| Thursday 22 June | |
| 9.00 | Meeting with Prime Minister |
| 11.00 | Meeting with Heads of United Nations agencies |
| 14.00 | Visit NGO working with street children |
| 20.00 | Official Dinner |
| Friday 23 June | |
| | Departure of Mission Members |

