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**Executive Board  
First Regular Session**

**Rome, 21 - 23 January 1997**

# **DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS FOR APPROVAL BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

## **Agenda item 6**

## **PROJECT SYRIA 2418 (Exp.4)**

(WIS No. SYR 00241804)

### **Assistance to reforestation and range land management**

Duration of project	Four years
Number of beneficiaries	29 200
Total food cost	13 171 850 dollars
Total cost to WFP	17 622 727 dollars
Total cost to Government	79 800 000 dollars

All monetary values are expressed in United States dollars, unless otherwise stated. Based on the United Nations official rate, one United States dollar equalled 26.6 pounds (LS) in June 1996. The official government rate was 11.2 LS to one dollar, and the parallel market rate 42 LS to one dollar. The latter rate has been applied unless otherwise indicated. However, it should be noted that exchange rate conversions can be misleading, given the concurrent use of three rates by the Government.

### **ABSTRACT**

Through the Government of Syria's afforestation programme, the project will provide food aid to some 29,000 landless rural labourers whose cash wages are inadequate to provide basic needs for their families. The beneficiaries of the project are predominantly women: 95 percent of workers at government nurseries and 70 percent of workers at forestry and range plantation sites. In this fourth and final phase, the project emphasizes the introduction of alternative income-generating activities for women labourers. At nurseries and in villages located near forestry and range plantation sites, the project will offer literacy courses combined with training and inputs for small-scale agricultural and food processing activities. Special emphasis will also be given to identifying, through pilot schemes, specific models and mechanisms for community forestry and range management as a means of ensuring the sustainability of long-term environmental activities and benefits. Carry over generated funds from the current phase, amounting to approximately two million dollars, will serve to finance productive activities for women, and to support the introduction of community forestry and range management. The project falls within the priority areas identified in WFP's strategy for phasing down its assistance to Syria.



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## NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

**This document contains recommendations for review and approval by the Executive Board.**

Pursuant to the decisions taken on the methods of work by the Executive Board at its First Regular Session of 1996, the documentation prepared by the Secretariat for the Board has been kept brief and decision-oriented. The meetings of the Executive Board are to be conducted in a business-like manner, with increased dialogue and exchanges between delegations and the Secretariat. Efforts to promote these guiding principles will continue to be pursued by the Secretariat.

The Secretariat therefore invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document, to contact the WFP staff member(s) listed below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting. This procedure is designed to facilitate the Board's consideration of the document in the plenary.

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

During 1996, the WFP country office, together with the Government of Syria, embarked on the preparation of a country strategy to define the most appropriate use of WFP's development resources for Syria as its assistance is scaled down substantially through the year 2000. The decline in WFP's overall development resources and the progress in economic and human development achieved by Syria have conditioned the strategy adopted, which calls for a further significant reduction in WFP assistance over the next five years. The overall commitment to Syria will decline from 67 million dollars (1991-95) to 29 million dollars (1996-2000). Annual commodity deliveries to Syria will be reduced to 12,000 tons (or approximately 3.3 million dollars) during the final year of the project that is before the Executive Board for its consideration and approval. Given WFP's present resource circumstances, this project would represent the last major intervention of WFP in Syria.

Syria is a low-income, food-deficit country and, as such, continues to qualify for WFP development assistance. The latest available estimates provided by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) place the 1993 per capita GNP at 1,170 dollars. UNDP and the World Bank more recently estimated that the per capita GDP for 1995 stood at 983 dollars. Analyses undertaken during preparation of the phase-down strategy confirmed that there is a compelling justification to continue WFP assistance, even at a substantially reduced level.

Despite recent economic growth and a steady advancement in the overall national indicators of human development, the 1996 Human Development Report reveals that more than half of the rural population (four million people) live on an annual per capita income of under 340 dollars, the threshold figure for absolute poverty established by the Government. The functionally landless workers, who represent the majority of WFP beneficiaries, have an estimated per capita income of 158 dollars a year. Women bear the brunt of rural poverty, reflected by literacy rates as low as 15 percent in some provinces and fertility rates often exceeding seven children per woman. For socio-cultural reasons, women have often been precluded from participating in or benefiting from economic development projects.

Agricultural production, which is a high priority of the Government and a primary strategy for achieving national food security, has failed to keep pace with the rapid rate of population growth. Per capita food production, in fact, has declined by 15 percent since 1980. Syria's population growth rate poses an additional major challenge to national food security. The annual rate of population growth has risen from an average of 2.5 percent during 1950-55 to 3.36 percent in 1995; in the poorest rural provinces, growth rates exceed four percent. The current population of 14 million is expected to reach 17 million by 2000 and to almost double by 2010. Combined with high annual inflation, these factors are adversely affecting the standard of living and the household food security of low-paid workers and the rural poor.

The high dependence on rain-fed agriculture leaves the country vulnerable to erratic rainfall and cyclical droughts. Although imports of basic commodities ensure that sufficient food is available nationally (the per capita daily calorie supply averages 3,175), malnutrition rates remain alarmingly high. An estimated 40 percent of children under five suffer from moderate or severe stunting, and 10 percent from wasting. Diarrhoeal disease and acute respiratory infection are leading causes of mortality among under-five-year-olds.

Nevertheless, there has been substantial economic and social progress in the country. GDP has grown by an average of five percent over the past three years, largely because of the rapid expansion of the oil and agriculture sectors. The infant mortality rate has been halved in



20 years, to 35 per thousand today. At 66 years, life expectancy is one of the highest in the region. If these trends are maintained, and complemented by a better targeted poverty alleviation strategy, there should be significant improvement in the general poverty and food security situation, creating the conditions for a rational and orderly withdrawal of WFP assistance.

There has been a significant evolution in the way WFP food aid is targeted in Syria. Beneficiaries are selected on the basis of socio-economic surveys undertaken by the implementing government departments prior to the start of projects. As a result, WFP food aid in Syria is now exclusively targeted to small-scale subsistence farmers and to landless daily workers in the poorest areas of the country, the majority of whom are women.

WFP food-for-work projects have made an especially valuable contribution to increasing women's employment and income-earning opportunities in poor rural areas, where food shortages are a part of everyday life. This is particularly impressive given the socio-cultural barriers that normally prevent the effective participation of rural women in economic development programmes. The workforce of WFP food-for-work projects has drawn an increasing number of women, often young, illiterate and the sole supporters of their families. This reflects in part the corresponding rise in the number of rural households whose livelihood is dependent on women's wage earnings. While only about one third of the workforce in the WFP afforestation project was female in 1980, it is estimated that at present between 90 and 95 percent of forestry nursery workers and, significantly, about 70 percent of plantation workers, are women. A similarly high percentage of women are workers in nurseries for the WFP-supported fruit-tree planting project (Syria 2746 (Exp.2) "Assistance to fruit-tree planting in the green belt", approved as a final expansion by the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA) in May 1995). The fruit-tree project further requires that one fifth of its farmer beneficiaries be women, thus providing them with permanent income-generating assets.

During the phasing down period through the year 2000, WFP will concentrate its assistance where it has been most effective: on building household food security through natural resource and agricultural development activities in the semi-arid and arid areas. Assistance to vulnerable group feeding programmes (Syria 2511 (Exp.3)) will be terminated with the end of the current expansion in 1997. Project Syria 2746 (Exp.2) and the forestry project now submitted to the Executive Board, will constitute WFP's programme in Syria for the period through the year 2000. These projects provide the main opportunity for the economic and social development of landless rural women and small-scale subsistence farmers.

The emphasis of WFP assistance in Syria 2418 (Exp.4) will shift from primarily addressing short-term household food shortages to providing a sustainable, productive economic base through the introduction of income-generating activities at the household level for food-for-work beneficiaries. With the phasing down of WFP assistance, the overarching objective of the Programme is to leave beneficiaries with permanent assets in order to help them achieve self-sufficiency, at the same time enabling the Government to further develop a strategy to sustain and expand these benefits beyond the duration of WFP assistance.

This strategy is consistent with WFP's Mission Statement and with the draft Country Strategy Note (CSN) for Syria for the period 1996-2000. It will be implemented in close cooperation with other United Nations agencies in the country.



## PROBLEM ANALYSIS

1. The natural forest and range cover originally present in Syria has been depleted over the centuries. In recent years the rate of deforestation has intensified as a result of pressure from humans and grazing animals, and the expansion of agricultural activities into forest and marginal areas. Deforestation has had a large-scale environmental impact, threatening traditional grazing areas and marginal lands which have been unsuitably cropped and which, in a typical desertification process, are now losing their top soil from wind and water erosion. Severe overgrazing and lack of proper planning and management have particularly affected the Syrian steppe, which occupies 56 percent of the total area of the country.
2. Despite the harsh conditions of the sites and the climate, and limited budgetary resources, the Government of Syria's afforestation efforts have yielded impressive increases in forest and range cover over the last 20 years. High-level policy commitments to environmental reclamation and protection since 1977 have resulted in the forest cover increasing from 2.4 to 3.8 percent of Syria's total surface. The Syrian Government attaches high priority to environmental protection and aims to return the country to the original 15 percent forest cover of the beginning of the century, and to plant about 40,000 hectares a year of range shrubs in the steppe areas.
3. The seriousness of the degradation in the steppe and the importance of livestock to small-scale herders have led the Government to give highest priority to steppe development. Range reserves on government land have been planted with shrubs in an attempt to address the major livestock problem of depressed productivity per head.
4. Although the Government has allocated considerable personnel and budget, total domestic resources directed to the forestry and range sectors are not sufficient to meet the Government's ambitious scale of proposed activities - in part because of the high cost of afforestation in Syria (estimated at over 41,250 LS per hectare). The high cost is due to a number of factors, among them: high inputs required for land clearing and preparation, labour- and capital-intensive tree watering and protection, the remoteness and degraded conditions of planting sites, and the increasing human and animal pressure on the sites. Despite these investments, however, the forestry sector's direct contribution to the economic development of the country and to local communities is minimal. As long-term environmental objectives have been paramount, the Government has until now neglected adopting a framework for developing, managing and exploiting the production possibilities of forest and range sites - through, for example, community forestry. In fact, only 60,000 of the 723,000 hectares covered by forests are currently productive. Given the magnitude of the land degradation problem to be tackled in Syria and the costliness of the present afforestation model, the long-term sustainability of the environmental objectives can be assured only through stronger community involvement.
5. The erosion of real wages and purchasing power caused by high inflation has offset to a large extent recent cash wage increases to forest and range workers. Food aid to the forestry sector over the last 30 years has improved household food security and helped bridge the differential between public and private sector wages. Besides helping the Government to meet its ambitious planting targets, food assistance has helped the Forest Directorate keep more skilled workers and reduce instability in the workforce during peak agricultural periods.



6. In spite of the income transfer derived from food assistance, the workforce is still comprised of poor, functionally landless labourers, with no productive assets, and little education or skills. For these workers, few other job opportunities exist. Increasingly, the workforce has included more women, often young and illiterate and the sole supporters of their families (the average size of families in rural areas is nine persons). From 36 percent of the total workforce in 1980, women now account for 90 to 95 percent of the workers in nurseries and about 70 percent of the plantation workers. The findings of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) by WFP, confirmed by a recently commissioned socio-economic survey, estimate the annual per capita household income for workers at 158 dollars against the absolute poverty line of 340 dollars per capita established by the Government. This compares with a national per capita GDP of 983 dollars (UNDP, 1996).
7. Traditionally, the Government's main measure to alleviate poverty and ensure household food security has been subsidizing basic food. In addition, major social services (primary health care, basic medical services, education) have been provided universally, although inevitably those living in more remote areas have had less access. The Government's commitment to improving the situation of the country's poor is reflected in strong improvements in social development indicators (e.g., the infant mortality rate has halved in 20 years and life expectancy is among the highest in the region). Nevertheless, with the rate of agricultural production failing to keep pace with population growth and with poverty remaining severe among segments of the rural population, the Government has recently moved away from a strictly centralized planned economy to cautious liberalization. In rural areas, this policy has led to reducing subsidies for agricultural inputs, and encouraging individual farmers and the private sector to engage in agricultural production and marketing. In line with the liberalization policy, the food subsidy system is also being phased out. While the Government is beginning to take fundamental steps towards market liberalization, with a view to creating long-term economic opportunities and addressing the root causes of poverty in rural areas, immediate improvements in the lives of the rural poor have been marginal.
8. Workers who have been assisted with WFP food aid for over 10 years consistently report that their family's food needs are more secure because of the commodities provided. Food shortages are still prevalent among many of the workers, especially during the winter months when the collection of vegetables and fruits from the mountain, range and forest areas is not possible.
9. Given the prevailing wage rates, the high degree of poverty of forest and range workers, and the need to ensure an adequate labour force to meet demanding centrally planned targets, food aid has proven to be an effective and justified means of support to workers and to environmental conservation. Although the project has been relatively successful in addressing short-term household food shortages, the long-term food security of worker households remains precarious. And while it has been successful in helping the Government to achieve its impressive afforestation targets, mechanisms are only recently being introduced, with WFP assistance, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the national afforestation programme.
10. The project addresses the need to reduce the food aid dependency of workers and the government forestry service. For workers, the project emphasizes the introduction of alternative productive activities, the creation of assets and the processing and conservation of food products at the household level. For the Government, the project supports the development of mechanisms enabling the Forestry and Steppe Directorates of the Ministry of Agriculture to achieve their long-term environmental objectives in a more cost-effective and sustainable manner through participatory forest and range management approaches.



## PREVIOUS WFP ASSISTANCE

11. WFP has been assisting afforestation through project Syria 2418, started in 1979. The first phase committed 15.1 million dollars for a period of three years; the project was subsequently expanded for another three years in 1982 with a commitment of 28.4 million dollars approved for afforestation and large-scale fruit-tree planting. A second expansion of three years was approved in 1986. Valued at 13.6 million dollars, it concentrated on afforestation. Fruit-tree planting was incorporated into the agricultural development project, Syria 2746. The second phase was extended until June 1991, when the third phase became operational. The third phase was approved at a cost of 20.6 million dollars for four years and included both afforestation and range activities. It was extended until June 1996.
12. During the life of the project, assistance has been successfully designed to support the Government's overall development strategies in connection with environmental conservation and anti-desertification objectives. The Government's long-term objectives are to afforest large areas of unproductive land, prevent further reductions in vegetative cover and surface and groundwater resources and protect agricultural land from erosion. Since the project's inception, its physical achievements and the extent to which they have been maintained by the Government have been impressive. Under Expansion 3, more than 100,000 hectares were established, and 166 million forest-tree seedlings and 48 million shrub seedlings produced. Survival rates depend highly on rainfall conditions and vary on average from 50 percent in semi-arid zones to 70 percent in higher rainfall areas. Systematic replanting has been carried out for up to two years after the initial planting, and watering has been assured by a fleet of 360 cistern trucks in order to compensate - to the extent possible - for low and erratic rainfall. The Government's commitment to maintaining the plantations has been strong, albeit strained by financial limitations. Furthermore, during the life of the project, WFP has successfully targeted the poorest, landless workers - and increasingly women.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND OUTPUTS

### Long-term objective

13. The long-term objective of the project is to improve the living standards of poor, functionally landless, unskilled workers (predominantly women) in 10 governorates of Syria by developing sustainable income-generating potential.

### Immediate objectives

14. The immediate objectives of the project are to:
  - a) improve the short-term income of:
    - i) workers in forest tree and shrub nurseries in all governorates;
    - ii) workers in silvicultural and protection teams in governorates with existing forest areas that are threatened by the lack of appropriate forest management;
    - iii) forestry development workers in 10 governorates;
    - iv) pasture development workers in seven governorates;
    - v) families engaged in pilot community forestry and range management activities;



- b) afforest or reforest large areas of otherwise unproductive land, prevent further reductions in plant cover and surface and underground water resources, protect agricultural land from erosion, and increase and protect the productivity of the Syrian steppe;
- c) develop and encourage the adoption of models for sustainable community forestry by fostering partnerships, securing user rights on trees, and introducing productive activities for women;
- d) develop and encourage the adoption of more integrated models for range development by directly involving participants in range improvement and productive activities for women;
- e) develop the income-earning potential and self-reliance of women who will identify and implement productive activities in support of forest and range activities;
- f) strengthen extension capacity at the village, district and governorate levels; and
- g) develop training modules and improve the delivery of services in support of participatory activities.

## ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

15. The project's activities and outputs are summarized below:

### *Objectives a) and b)*

- a) annual production of 48 million seedlings in 38 forest-tree nurseries and 17 million seedlings in 15 shrub nurseries, covering all governorates and involving 3,500 labourers;
- b) establishment of 20 silvicultural teams of 85 workers each in six governorates: Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Idleb, Tartous and Lattakia;
- c) establishment of 10 permanent protection teams of 45 workers each in the same six governorates, and of one temporary team in 12 governorates;
- d) planting of 23,600 hectares of forestry sites in 10 governorates: Aleppo, Hama, Homs, Rural Damascus, Raqqa, Deir Ezzor, Idleb, Dara'a, Sweida and Quneitra, involving 16,700 forestry development workers; and
- e) annual planting of 18,000 hectares of range land sites in seven governorates: Aleppo, Rural Damascus, Sweida, Hama, Homs, Raqqa and Deir Ezzor, involving 3,200 pasture development workers.

### *Objective c)*

- establishment, development and protection over the four-year period of 2,500 hectares of forest land with a mixture of forest, fruit and forage species. Forty villages and 2,000 families will be involved in community forestry, and given user rights to the land; 2,000 women from these families will be engaged in implementing WFP-assisted productive activities

### *Objective d)*



- development, over the four-year period, of 3,000 hectares of range land with fodder shrubs, emphasizing a balance between conservation and production. Sixty herding/range management cooperatives (or individuals) will be given user rights to the land. About 1,200 women from the cooperatives will be engaged in implementing WFP-assisted productive activities

*Objective e)*

- literacy courses, training and implementation of productive activities for 1,200 women from 55 nurseries and 10 villages near plantation or nursery sites

*Objective f)*

- selection and training of 100 village contact persons in 50 WFP project villages and 20 persons in 10 FAO project villages; training and redeployment of Ministry of Agriculture staff to support participatory activities

*Objective g)*

- different training modules and extension materials prepared for improving the delivery of services in support of participatory activities and for improving the technical capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR) in forest conservation and management; 23 training seminars and workshops to be held at the central, governorate, district, unit and village levels

16. Carryover generated funds from Project Syria 2418 (Exp.3), amounting to approximately two million dollars, will finance: a) training in productive activities for women, and within the Ministry of Agriculture for improved extension services and improved technical capacity in forest management and conservation (585,000 dollars); b) inputs for productive activities for women workers, and range and forestry participatory approaches (1,275,000 dollars); and c) monitoring and evaluation of productive activities for women and participatory approaches, and case studies (140,000 dollars).

## ROLE AND FUNCTION OF FOOD AID

### Role

17. Food aid will serve as:

- a) an income transfer to poor, food-insecure labourers;
- b) a budgetary support to the Government of Syria, allowing it to meet its environmental programme targets, while simultaneously encouraging it to lease land in order to develop community participation models that stress sustainability through a participatory approach; and
- c) an incentive and income substitute for cooperatives, groups and individuals to develop forest and range lands, including through land leases.

### Function

18. Labourers in the project area spend on average over 65 percent of their income on food, and face recurring food shortages during the winter. Since almost all workers are



functionally landless, with no tradition of developing small home gardens, the variety and quantity of food consumed are severely curtailed. Employment opportunities are extremely limited and public sector wages, including for forestry, are low (70 LS a day compared with 150 - 200 LS paid by the private sector during peak harvesting periods).

### **Food inputs and commodity justification**

19. A total of about 24 million workdays will be required to meet project targets within the Government's overall planting strategy. Labourers will receive one family ration for each day worked (one family ration equals five individual rations) or an average of 25 family rations a month.
20. In view of the resource constraints faced by WFP, the preference for and value of certain commodities to workers, and the logistical advantages of simplifying the food basket, only two commodities will be supplied to beneficiaries. One family food ration a month, with no wage deduction, will consist of 50 kilograms of wheat flour and 1.25 kilogram of vegetable oil.
21. There will be no wage deduction from workers for their ration, as is done under the current phase. Since the workers make no payment for the food in the new expansion, the ration has been decreased slightly in order to maintain roughly the same level of income transfer.
22. The effective market value of the monthly family ration is 613 LS. Combined with the current daily wage of 70 LS (2,500 LS a month, including social benefits) for an unskilled forest worker, the total value of the monthly wage is 3,113 LS. The income-transfer value of the ration is equivalent to 25 percent of the worker's wage. This yields a total annual income of 889 dollars or 37,356 LS, as compared with the per capita poverty line figure of 500 dollars. Assuming the average family size of nine with a single wage earner, the annual per capita household income amounts to 99 dollars.

## **PROJECT STRATEGY**

### **Implementation strategy**

23. The project will assist the Government in meeting its environmental programme targets, and help reduce food insecurity in 10 governorates of Syria. Its overall approach is to address the issues of low income, food insecurity and sustainability of assets created by continuing to assist ongoing forestry and steppe development activities. The project concentrates efforts in the poorest governorates, taking into consideration technical aspects and targeting the poorest landless labourers, predominantly women, working within the Forest and Range Directorate's regular programme of work.
24. WFP assistance will directly improve workers' food security and income, at the same time attempting to enhance the sustainability of project-assisted activities and reduce the dependency of workers and the Government on WFP assistance. Food assistance will augment and complement government and other donor efforts aimed at achieving socio-economic and environmental objectives. It will also support efforts to develop and implement mechanisms to involve communities in the establishment, maintenance, protection and sharing of benefits from afforestation and range activities.
25. The strategy of the project is to emphasize sustainability and reduce food dependency by:
  - a) providing smaller individual food rations to workers;



- b) limiting distributions of family rations to one member per family;
- c) concentrating planting and income-generating activities in the poorest governorates and in the remote marginal zones of these governorates;
- d) encouraging and assisting the Government to develop pilot participatory models for forest and range management in order to assure the long-term objective of environmental conservation and protection; and
- e) using carryover generated funds to build greater self-sufficiency among the mainly women project workers through the introduction of alternative income-generating activities.

### Generated funds

26. Although no funds will be generated in the project, carryover funds from the current phase will be used to address the issues of sustainable income generation and household food security. Funds will support a defined set of activities which contribute directly to family food supplies, address illiteracy, or generate income without a high investment outlay. The funds will be directed primarily towards strengthening the earning potential of women and reducing the household workload of women workers. Uncommitted funds from Syria 2418 (Exp.3) were frozen by the State Planning Commission (SPC), effective March 1996, to support these activities. SPC has agreed that a sum in Syrian pounds equivalent to approximately two million dollars<sup>1</sup> (or a minimum of 1.6 million dollars) will be transferred to the project. Availability of the funds in an interest-bearing account, with an acceptable market interest rate, will be a pre-condition laid out in the project's plan of operations.
27. Funds will be disbursed through SPC. A savings committee, with the participation of SPC, MAAR and WFP, will meet periodically to review the utilization of funds and approve allocations. The project will coordinate the planning, implementation and monitoring of nursery and village income-generating activities with the FAO Forestry and Food Security project GCP/INT/539/ITA and, where feasible, with the General Union of Women, the General Peasants' Union and other institutions.
28. Activities will be organized in nurseries as well as in villages that have high concentrations of plantation workers. Participants will ultimately decide upon the activity appropriate for their situation, but the project will propose a range of activities aimed primarily at women and enabling them to increase their income and food supplies and reduce drudgery and time constraints. Viable activities, which could be adapted to meet local demand and conditions, include but are not restricted to:
- a) literacy courses;
  - b) processing/drying of fruits; bee raising for honey and wax production; vegetable, mushroom, spice and medicinal plant production and marketing; poultry, sheep and goat raising; household shops; preparation and marketing of dairy products (cheese, butter and yoghurt); and
  - c) training in agricultural techniques such as grafting and pruning.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated at the parallel market rate of one dollar = 42 LS.



29. Given the participatory approach favoured by the project, the estimates given below for the allocation of carryover funds should be considered flexible, and will be finalized on the basis of the actual activities identified by participants.
30. At nursery sites and at 10 nearby villages, training will be organized during working hours and workers will collectively implement activities after work. The total package will assist approximately 20 workers per nursery or village. An indicative figure of 5,000 dollars would be allocated to each of 55 nurseries and 10 villages, for a total of 325,000 dollars.
31. Village-level support will be provided to plantation workers and other women in the community through two mechanisms: 1) a total of 500,000 dollars will be allocated for small-scale agricultural activities implemented in villages and cooperatives that are undertaking pilot participatory approaches in range and forest areas; 2) a total of 50,000 dollars will be allocated for cooperation with the FAO Forestry and Food Security Project and will be concentrated in 10 villages covered by the FAO project. Funds totalling about 400,000 dollars will be used to improve extension support to productive activities, including the purchase of motorcycles and the provision of funds to support the management capacity of the General Union of Women.
32. Training of Forest and Steppe Directorate staff in silvicultural management and forest-fire prevention will be jointly financed by WFP and MAAR. Training in extension techniques and participatory approaches, together with the development and production of training materials, will also be financed with carryover funds. Training will be provided at the national, governorate, district, unit and village levels. The total allocation of carryover funds for training and materials will be 585,000 dollars. Finally, carryover funds will be used to support monitoring and evaluation (M&E), the preparation of case studies and contingencies (for a total of 140,000 dollars).

### **Food logistics**

33. WFP commodities will be shipped to the ports of Lattakia and/or Tartous where they are cleared by the General Institution of Consumption and then despatched by project trucks or by train to the project's central warehouses in Lattakia and the provincial warehouses of the respective governorates. Wheat flour will be handed over to the General Establishment for Cereals Processing and Trade, which will arrange for the release of an equivalent amount in similar quality to governorates where the project sites are located according to agreed distribution schedules. The project currently operates satisfactory storage facilities and an efficient food distribution system. It has at its disposal a central warehouse with a capacity of 7,000 tons as well as regional storage amounting to 3,000 tons. Other storage facilities will be made available as necessary.
34. Food distributions will be effected at the work sites, on the basis of beneficiary lists drawn up by the relevant project supervisory units.

### **Phasing out**

35. This terminal phase of project Syria 2418 places high priority on mechanisms that will reduce worker and government dependency on WFP food assistance and lead to more sustainable asset creation by MAAR and labourers. The project will emphasize the necessity to involve individuals, communities and cooperatives in the establishment, maintenance, protection and sharing of benefits, in order to reduce government expenditure on afforestation and ensure the sustained level of inputs required to safeguard the large investment in forest and tree cover. The Government is aware of the need to involve



communities more actively in forest and steppe development, but efforts are required during this final phase to assist the Government in developing the appropriate mechanisms and incentive levels to ensure broader private involvement.

36. Training and inputs for income-generating activities will give workers income alternatives for the period after WFP assistance has ceased, and provide the Government with a framework and the experience to continue this type of intervention after the project terminates. Approximately 15 percent of all beneficiaries (and 20 to 25 percent of women beneficiaries) will receive training and support for income-generating activities, a modest yet realistic figure, considering the pilot nature of the component, the limited experience of the Government and, most importantly, the beneficiaries' other time-consuming household responsibilities. No further WFP assistance will be provided beyond this final project phase.

## PROJECT SUPPORT

37. The project will be implemented under the overall responsibility of the State Planning Commission (SPC) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR). The Government will make available to the project the required resources and institutional backstopping for execution, and for monitoring and reporting on project progress as per the current phase. SPC will be designated as the channel of communications between the Government and WFP with respect to policy matters, whereas the Deputy Minister of Agriculture will be designated as the channel of communications on detailed technical and operational matters.
38. The Director of Forestry within MAAR will be the Project Manager, and will be supported by a project staff composed of one Deputy Director, two engineers and one accountant. With regard to range land development activities, the Director of the Steppe (MAAR) will be the technical director of this project component and will be assisted by the Deputy Director of the Steppe, one engineer and one accountant.
39. At the governorate level, all project activities, including the drawing up of annual plans, will be undertaken by the governorate project staff, which includes the Director of Agriculture, the Chief of the Forestry Service and the Chief of Service of the Steppe Development. Governorate-level plans are submitted to MAAR. The latter consolidates them into one national plan, which in turn is submitted to the Supreme Council of Agriculture which convenes each year to discuss, review and approve the annual schemes.
40. As the forestry and range land development schemes enjoy high government priority and food assistance represents the only significant external assistance foreseen in the near future, the Government will make available out of its resources the required funding to implement the project. The total government costs of the project are estimated at 3,351.6 million LS or 79.8 million dollars.
41. The governorate-level Directorates of Agriculture will be responsible for the daily execution and monitoring of project activities. The WFP country office will work closely with the respective Directorates of Agriculture in order to ensure that standard indicators are used to monitor and evaluate the long-term objective as well as each of the short-term objectives of the project. Ongoing village-level monitoring will be carried out by extension units of the Directorates of Agriculture. The information collected will be provided to the WFP country office twice a year.



## Other donors

42. For income-generating activities at the village and nursery level, FAO will cooperate and share costs with WFP through FAO project GCP/INT/539/ITA - "Forestry and Food Security Project". FAO will provide the technical assistance (including one expert, activity planning and training) for a total cost of about 190,000 dollars, thereby complementing the funds for inputs and training provided by WFP. Coordination and cooperation with the FAO project will increase the coverage of activities and assure the technical quality of proposed agricultural income-generating and community forestry activities.

## BENEFICIARIES AND BENEFITS

43. Project beneficiaries will include over 26,000 temporary workers who are employed by the Forest and Steppe Directorates during the life of the project, corresponding to 24 million workdays, based on worknorms established by the Government. The project will emphasize more precise targeting in an attempt to meet its overall objectives. Specifically, it will target temporary workers who:
- a) are 18 years of age or above;
  - b) experience food shortages and are the major income earners in the family;
  - c) live in remote marginal areas of the poorest governorates;
  - d) have no functional land, assets, education, skills or other income-earning opportunities; and
  - e) are considered to be the poorest, with low annual per capita incomes below the poverty line (21,000 LS) and, in most instances, below the absolute poverty line (15,000 LS).
44. Project beneficiaries will also include 2,000 individuals, most of whom are landless, who have been granted user rights to government forestry land. In addition, approximately 1,200 herder families members of cooperatives that have been granted user rights to government range land will be project beneficiaries. Poorer herder families (with fewer than 50 animals per family) who are at least semi-settled will be targeted.

## Anticipated effects of the project on women

45. The project has already successfully attracted and targeted women. As of 1996, between 90 and 95 percent of the workers in nurseries and about 70 percent of the plantation workers are women, and this proportion is likely to rise slightly. The project until now has increased and diversified women's employment and income-earning opportunities in poor rural areas where there are few employment opportunities and where food shortages are a part of everyday life. Nevertheless, in this final phase, more concerted efforts will be made to leave women with sustainable skills and assets for the period following the termination of WFP assistance. The project will promote literacy and health courses at work sites and try to ensure that workers are offered opportunities to improve their skills and access to inputs that may help reduce their work loads, improve their families' nutritional status and help them generate additional income within their already constrained schedules.
46. Training and inputs for nursery and plantation workers will concentrate on small-scale agricultural activities which are cost-effective and appropriate to their rural lives, such as fruit processing, vegetable gardens, raising and marketing of poultry, grafting and pruning



techniques, and beekeeping. Productive activities for women in range cooperatives will concentrate on goat and sheep production and the processing and conservation of dairy products. Workers in project nurseries and women plantation workers from roughly 100 villages will have the opportunity to participate in training for productive activities.

Bearing in mind the serious time constraints faced by most of these women, it is expected that some 20 to 25 percent women beneficiaries will ultimately benefit from this type of training.

47. The Government's commitment to improve the working conditions and earning potential of women participating in the project is evident from its decision to freeze some two million dollars in generated funds from the present phase - which would have been used primarily as budgetary support for MAAR - and redirect those funds towards activities in support of women in the project's final phase. In addition, the Government has agreed to reinforce the project's management structure and its extension capacity with the appointment of women in a number of key positions. At the central and governorate levels, women will be appointed to coordinate and organize participatory activities. Women technicians in productive activities and women foresters will also be assigned to extension teams at the district and unit levels. Finally, the Government will appoint one female nursery supervisor at each project nursery.

### **Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)**

48. Monitoring by the WFP country office has become increasingly intensive, using beneficiary contact monitoring (BCM) forms and in-depth discussions to develop a sample of worker socio-economic profiles. Government records at the district and governorate levels are cross-checked by country office staff with regard to physical achievements, food distribution and beneficiary targeting. Visits are followed by a report to the Government with recommendations for improvement. Under the new phase of the project, quantitative indicators for monitoring have been developed which focus on the physical achievements of the project and the distribution of rations. These indicators will then be linked with qualitative dimensions in order to measure, for example, the effectiveness of land-use rights, the success of the project's productive activities in increasing household incomes, the extent of village participation in community forestry activities, and the extent of women's participation and access to benefits. Newly designed BCM forms and a standard form for monitoring village-level participation will be used during all monitoring visits by MAAR extension units as well as by WFP country office staff. Training for MAAR staff in M&E techniques, including participatory rapid appraisal, will be financed from carryover generated funds.
49. The project will be evaluated after its termination in order to assess the impact of terminating WFP assistance and the effects of the project on: household food security and income, the achievement of MAAR's targets, the long-term implications of young women working in the forest sector, and the effect of the project's income-generating measures on household incomes and food security.

## **PROJECT FEASIBILITY**

50. A WFP/FAO mission was conducted in March 1996 to review the ongoing project and appraise the Government's request for an expansion. The mission concluded that the project was being satisfactorily implemented and that the continuation of WFP assistance



was justified under a new phase which would place greater emphasis on: a) sustainably improving low incomes and household food security; and b) developing mechanisms enabling MAAR to achieve its long-term environmental objectives in a more cost-effective and sustainable manner. The mission also concluded that a new phase was necessary in order to reduce the dependency on food aid by the workers and MAAR as WFP assistance is phased out. Finally, the mission concluded that the project was sound from a technical, social and economic perspective and that adequate measures had been included in the project design to ensure sustainability and account for potential risks to implementation.

51. The forestry activities to be undertaken are largely those that have already proven feasible during previous phases of the project, i.e., seedling production, plantation establishment and maintenance, and silvicultural activities. The WFP/FAO mission concluded that the physical execution of works is generally sound from a technical perspective. Species selection, spacing, maintenance and silvicultural operations are standard with slight modifications from region to region, depending on rainfall requirements and soils. The survival rate of trees, which ranges from 50 percent (arid and semi-arid areas) to 70 percent (higher rainfall areas), is considered satisfactory given the extremely harsh conditions of many of the plantation sites. Watering is ensured by a fleet of 360 cistern trucks, compensating, to the extent possible, for low and erratic rainfall. More consideration still needs to be given to expanding the range of species planted to include multi-product species, mainly olive, local varieties of pistachio and pine, and to introduce species which require less water and can survive in a given zone with only three years of watering.
52. The introduction of community involvement in the management of range and forestry assets created will be on a pilot level. The Government is now embarking on a project with European Union (EU) assistance to modify forest policy and legislation to better incorporate community participation, and to train staff both within and outside the country. A follow-up mission to the WFP/FAO one has identified specific, pilot forestry and range activities for the project so that different participatory approaches for the management and protection of natural resources can be tested. These include pilot planting models that should produce sustainable benefits for beneficiaries and that comply with the Government's environmental objectives. In addition, benefit-sharing arrangements and participatory approaches for organizing individuals and groups in natural resource management have been specified. The details of the recommendations will be included in the project's plan of operations. By introducing concrete models applied under different conditions, WFP assistance in this area is also intended to help the Government develop a legal framework for community participation in forestry and range land development.
53. As regards support to income-generating activities, workers confirmed through interviews their interest in participating in training that could be undertaken during the regular working day. They also stressed that they would prefer to participate in group activities in which labour and inputs could be shared. Activities will focus on simple, small-scale agricultural production and food processing, and will receive technical support from FAO project GCP/INT/539/ITA - Forestry and Food Security, which has already developed training and input packages that have been applied successfully in the project area. The General Union of Women will provide support for literacy and training courses. In addition, a consultant fielded by WFP has developed the modalities and mechanisms for the project's income-generating component, specifying the needs of women, appropriate activities for project beneficiaries, the institutions and organizations that could provide technical backstopping for identified activities, and approaches for organizing groups of women and men workers. The detailed findings of the consultant will be incorporated into the project's plan of operations.



## DISINCENTIVES, DISPLACEMENT AND DEPENDENCY

54. Syria continues to import significant quantities of cereals in order to satisfy consumption requirements. Even after years of good rainfall and high harvests, between 1991 and 1993, annual cereal imports averaged 1.3 million tons.
55. The average annual supplies for the project will amount to 12,000 tons of wheat flour and 300 of edible oil. Added to WFP food shipments planned for other operational projects in the country, annual shipments to Syria - assuming the availability of commodities to fulfil WFP's commitments - will amount to approximately 18,500 tons of wheat flour, 550 of edible oil and 540 of pulses. In view of the relatively small amounts of food aid imports as compared to local production and commercial imports, it is not expected that food aid shipments under this project will affect negatively the established trade patterns or the local production of these commodities.
56. Workers are mainly landless labourers who work for varying periods, depending on the activity involved. Employment opportunities offered by the Forestry Department have had no negative effects on the availability of labour for agricultural activities in the peak seasons; therefore, the project is not considered to have any disincentive effects on agricultural production.
57. To reduce the risk of beneficiary dependency under Expansion 4 - the final phase of WFP assistance - the number of commodities and the ration have been reduced. Recent rises in government wages have largely been offset by inflation. Although it acknowledges the problem, the Government is still not in a position to achieve parity between official minimum wage rates and prevailing real market wages. Food aid partially fills this gap. In order to further reduce the risk of dependency in a concrete manner, the project focuses on providing beneficiaries with alternative income-generating and small-scale food production skills to help ensure household food security following the termination of WFP assistance.

## PROJECT COSTS

58. The cost breakdown for the project is as follows:

PROJECT COST BREAKDOWN			
	Quantity (tons)	Average cost per ton	Value (dollars)
<b>WFP COSTS</b>			
<b>A. Direct operational costs</b>			
Commodity			
- Wheat flour	48 116	250	12 029
- Vegetable oil	1 203	903	1 142
<b>Subtotal commodities</b>	<b>49 319</b>		<b>13 171</b>
External transport	49 319	44	2 144
<b>Subtotal direct operational costs</b>			<b>15 316</b>



<b>B.</b>	<b>Direct support costs</b>	
	- Evaluation	75 000
	<b>Subtotal direct support costs</b>	<b>75 000</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>Indirect support costs (14.5 percent of total direct costs)</b>	<b>2 231</b>
	<b>TOTAL WFP COSTS</b>	<b>17 622</b>

#### **GOVERNMENT COSTS**

Food handling, transport and distribution	1 407
Staff costs	3 146
Wages of workers	13 335
Plantation establishment	41 310
Tools/equipment/machinery	10 641
Fuel and other requisites	9 959
<b>TOTAL GOVERNMENT COSTS</b>	<b>79 800</b>

<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST (WFP and Government)</b>	<b>97 422</b>
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WFP costs as a percentage of total project costs: 18%

