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SUMMARY EVALUATION REPORT¹ ON WFP ASSISTED EMERGENCY RELIEF OPERATIONS IN THE CAUCASUS (GEORGIA, AZERBAIJAN), INCLUDING THE CLAU² OPERATION

¹ An evaluation mission visited Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia from 23 May through 11 June 1996. The mission consisted of a senior evaluation officer, WFP/OEDE (team leader); a transport economist/logistics expert, OEDE consultant; and a socio-economist, OEDE consultant.

² "Caucasus Logistics Advisory Unit".

ABSTRACT

In the three Caucasus republics, the break-up of the former Soviet system, compounded by ethnic strife, has created very difficult socio-economic conditions for the population and substantial caseloads of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who increased the number of vulnerable people facing extreme hardship. Under these circumstances, food aid provided by WFP as emergency and post-emergency relief has been essential. It has also cushioned the negative effects that accompany the formidable efforts to transform society economically and politically. In spite of some improvement, the economic and food access problems in the three countries are deeply rooted and cannot be overcome quickly by just changing ownership structures and establishing a market economy. Therefore, the mission found the continuation of strictly targeted food aid justified. Overall, the WFP-assisted operation was successful and helped to ease the hardship faced by vulnerable people, particularly during the harsh winter periods. By ensuring almost continuous availability of wheat for bread to large parts of the population, it was instrumental in avoiding an even more dramatic deterioration in their conditions. Some weaknesses were found in beneficiary targeting and, occasionally, coordination between aid providers as to food ration levels. However, related efforts were stepped up and further supported by specific recommendations of the mission.

The CLAU operation was a special and very successful feature of the operation. Originally conceived to facilitate throughput of relief food and goods by WFP and other donors, it had much further-reaching effects as it helped to improve regional cooperation between the three countries in spite of their difficult relationships. Furthermore, the CLAU activities have helped to stabilize the region's transport economy by preventing further deterioration of the logistics infrastructure and promoting its more effective use. WFP's logistics expertise has been highly appreciated by the international donor community and the three countries. The evaluation suggests that WFP make more use of this expertise in future emergencies, even where it goes beyond support to WFP food aid operations.

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BACKGROUND

1. The break-down of the former Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in fundamental political changes in its constituent republics and in their economic collapse. Having functioned for decades as integrated, though highly inefficient, centrally planned economies, independently they faced paramount difficulties in functioning economically. Problems of obsolete production processes and equipment were compounded by the sudden loss of traditional Soviet markets and resulting lack of revenues and incomes.
2. In the Caucasus republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, economic problems were exacerbated by the re-emergence of old national conflicts and civil strife. In addition to causing tragic loss of lives, these conflicts created large numbers of internally displaced people (IDPs) and refugees who increased the size of vulnerable groups already depending on state support and social welfare. At the same time, the former Soviet social welfare system was unable to cope with the greater and more demanding case load, which was becoming ever more vulnerable to shortages of food and shelter.
3. In the three countries, the economic perspectives as well as progress in readjustment, liberalisation and privatization differ considerably. In Georgia, previously one of the republics with the highest standard of living, large parts of the population from different social strata (including some 280,000 IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia) slid into extreme poverty due to the economic decline and civic and ethnic strife. In Azerbaijan, which already had been one of the poorest republics, the still unsettled conflict with Armenia over the territory of Nagorny Karabakh produced 900,000 displaced persons and contributed substantially to the decline of the economy and increase in poverty. In Armenia, which enjoyed high living standards during Soviet times, the conflict with Azerbaijan (approximately 300,000 refugees and displaced persons on the Armenian side) had strong repercussions on the socio-economic situation, in addition to the effects of the 1988 earthquake and the economic blockade imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan.
4. At the time of the mission, the structural adjustment process was advancing in Georgia and particularly in Armenia, where, under the privatisation programme, some 50 percent of the former state enterprises had been sold at the end of the first quarter of 1996. By contrast, structural adjustment as well as privatisation of land and industry were progressing very slowly, and some 75 percent of all enterprises were still state-owned. The general economic situation was reported to have improved slightly, particularly in Georgia. In spite of this, it had not gained enough momentum to produce significant improvements in the standard of living of the population. Azerbaijan's fairly positive prospects for future development depend, however, on the implementation of oil agreements signed with foreign companies. Furthermore, the poorer strata of the population may not automatically share in the benefits from the oil revenues.
5. In response to the outbreak of the Abchazian conflict and the overall situation described above, and in order to reduce the risk of malnutrition, WFP has been providing emergency food aid to the three countries since late 1993 within the framework of various UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals. WFP food is targeted at the displaced, returnee and refugee populations, as well as vulnerable groups (elderly, orphans, female-headed households, etc.) that are particularly food-insecure as a result of the continuing economic crisis. Targeted beneficiary caseloads at the time of the mission were 300,000 in Georgia, 250,000 in Armenia and 225,000 in Azerbaijan. WFP food rations are considered to be



supplementary, on the assumption that beneficiary groups normally have access to some sources of food.

6. The delivery of large quantities of food and other relief goods in Georgia, some with final destinations to Armenia and Azerbaijan, posed a major challenge for WFP and the donor community due to the countries' political isolation, compounded by harsh climatic conditions in winter and a deteriorated regional transport infrastructure. As bilateral aid programmes increased, the international donor community requested WFP to commence a logistics support operation; established in October 1993 in Tbilisi, this became the Caucasus Logistics Advisory Unit (CLAU). Drawing on the successful experience of the WFP-managed logistics centre during the Southern African drought, the mandate was to facilitate the logistics of relief and programme food aid in the region to reach beneficiaries in a timely, reliable and effective way. The task included coordination of arrival and onward rail transportation of food shipments; technical advice and assistance to donors as well as transport authorities; and management of special logistics intervention projects aimed at increasing the throughput of the Georgian ports (Poti, Batumi) and the regional railways (including provision of equipment and reconstruction of bridges). The CLAU activities were to be undertaken as a regional operation covering the three Caucasus republics since, from a humanitarian relief and logistics¹ viewpoint, the Caucasus was considered a "homogeneous" area.
7. The sea/overland operation, expanded into a complex logistics coordination mechanism, was ultimately responsible for facilitating not only WFP-targeted supplementary food assistance but also substantial amounts of bilateral programmed food aid from the USA and the EU.
8. Since inception, donor contributions to WFP food relief operations in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan have amounted to approximately 72 million dollars. Contributions to logistics including the CLAU operations have amounted to approximately 18.5 million dollars.²

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

9. The evaluation was conducted to assess the performance of the WFP relief operations in terms of relevance, timeliness and effectiveness as well as benefits of the food aid provided to the three countries. In addition, it was to assess also the CLAU operation in particular and its effects on the humanitarian relief undertaken by WFP and other donors. The evaluation was to draw lessons for future WFP support to similar operations and for the discussion of WFP's role as a provider of food and implementor in relief operations; and as a provider of technical expertise and services concerning the movement of relief food and goods.
10. Given the ambitious nature of the logistics coordination mechanisms established by WFP and the assistance provided to the regional transport infrastructure, the evaluation was also to address WFP's interest in the scope emergency logistics activities have in the transition from relief to development.

¹ Virtually all food had to be supplied via the Georgian Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi.

² Figures at the time of the mission.



11. Issues such as efficient targeting of beneficiaries; direct implementation by WFP; and FFW as an option in the transition were also to be considered.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Achievements and benefits of the operation

WFP food assistance

12. No detailed objectives were established for the WFP food relief operations - and no indicators had been set up to measure progress. However, from the various UN Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals which provided the basis for WFP food aid interventions, it can be inferred that WFP food aid was aimed at the prevention of hunger and malnutrition of the most vulnerable groups and at strengthening their coping capacity. Reaching these objectives would in turn contribute to the wider objective of socio-political stabilisation.
13. The mission concluded that the WFP food aid has contributed to the achievement of these objectives by way of immediate relief for refugees and IDPs and assistance to sustain these and other targeted vulnerable people. Without WFP food supplementing meager incomes, for instance from social welfare (as little as the equivalent of three to four dollars per month), these beneficiaries who were pushed by circumstances below the poverty line would have seen an even greater deterioration in their coping ability.
14. In the absence of vulnerability and food insecurity monitoring, the degree to which food aid has eased survival might actually have been underestimated. In spite of occasional break-downs in the pipeline, overall reliable and regular food distribution provided target groups and households with secure access to basic food items, particularly during the long, difficult winter period. This, together with WFP's overall successful coordination of food aid¹ from different sources, particularly wheat, helped to support the vital rationed bread supply system in the three countries and were certainly contributing factors in preventing the deterioration of the nutritional status of large parts of the population: neither starvation nor widespread malnutrition were reported during the review period. The monetary value of the food rations helped to release depressed funds or assets of the family to procure other items and services essential for survival.
15. However, additional coping mechanisms are applied by the target groups, since the monetary equivalent of the food rations makes up less than a quarter of the average minimum requirements of a person, and income from employment or social benefits is almost negligible. People economise to the maximum and utilise fully the informal social network, such as friends and relatives. Other means include petty trade and commerce (e.g. sun flower seeds), migration and remittances from relatives in Russia, as well as illegal means.
16. WFP food aid provided to a significant number of people has probably contributed to avoiding social unrest during dramatic periods of economic crisis and scarcity of basic food

¹ Occasionally, some problems were faced in WFP's efforts to harmonize food ration levels between various donors. This led also to some lack of control over beneficiaries accessing different food aid sources at the same time.



items. At the same time, it has granted a certain "breathing space" to the three Governments (particularly in Armenia and Georgia) to initiate some of the necessary institutional and structural reforms in a period of profound societal transformation.

The Logistics Operation

17. Overall, the CLAU operation has achieved its expected results, producing important benefits for the economies and communities in the region. Apart from its vital and successful contribution to the safe transport, delivery and monitoring of the relief operation, it has carried an important additional element in that WFP was called upon to provide logistics service for bilateral aid schemes.
18. Results and benefits achieved have been both of a "technical and a "strategic" nature. Through provision of "hardware" and "software" to the region's ports and railways, the safe carriage of some 3,794,400 metric tons of programme and target food aid was achieved. The fact that WFP's share represented only about 2.3% of these quantities underlines the potential of an expanded future role for WFP, not only in the Caucasus but also elsewhere, in the provision of logistics expertise.
19. Through its overall coordinating function CLAU was able to collect, centralise and disseminate information, which would not have been achieved as effectively by other agencies. Detailed information on quantities, date and places of arrival of food (including at EDPs) was essential for the three Governments, other donors and WFP's implementing NGO partners in order to maintain a dependable flow of aid to beneficiaries.
20. Monitoring of overall food aid needs through WFP country offices, correlated with reports from other UN agencies and shipping information from WFP HQs and other donors, enabled CLAU to successfully allocate arriving ships between the two Georgian ports on a predetermined basis so as not to overwhelm their respective handling capacity. CLAU's regular liaison with shippers, handling agents and railway authorities helped to identify and avoid temporary bottlenecks of given transport corridors by selecting alternative routes.
21. Maintaining an efficient balance between tonnage and port capacity at Poti and Batumi ports was achieved by close CLAU monitoring and advice, which included monitoring of shipment and berth availability by a CLAU-appointed port captain at Batumi. This was particularly important given the large food consignments provided by the EU and the USA in addition to WFP and NGOs. Thus, detrimental effects of ship delays and stockpiling of consignments at the ports were avoided. At the same time, CLAU assisted the Georgian Railways to coordinate its operations through the Rail Operations Centre in order to provide the ports with sufficient wagons.
22. In performing its task of identifying constraints for the effective running of the logistics operation, CLAU prompted the initial fielding of assessment missions to separately examine port and rail operations. As for the region's rail operations, the interventions led to improved coordination between port and rail and between the rail authorities of the three countries through the establishment of the Tbilisi Rail Operations Centre. Additional requirements covered rail maintenance and spares, as well as the construction of two new bridges (Banusha and Natenebi). Capacity and performance were improved for both port and rail with regard to most measurable performance indicators.¹

¹ Port daily discharge rates improved from 1,152 mt/day in 1994 to 1,988 mt/day in early 1995 and 2,566 mt/day in mid-1995. The latest discharge rate recorded was 9,829 mt/day in June 1996. Turn-around



23. The development of indigenous capability to coordinate and efficiently manage regional logistics (in a different way than in Soviet times) was furthered through short-term training on emergency cargo management for Georgian Railway officials at the South African SPOORNET Rail Mission (May 1994). The subsequent establishment of the Railway Operations Centre (OPS) provides on-the-job training to Georgian, Armenian and Azeri railway staff in monitoring and coordinating rail movements of all humanitarian cargo and ensuring the timely availability of empty rail wagons for onward transportation to EDPs.
24. The information input of the logistics operation into the bi-weekly Food Aid Coordination Meetings chaired by the respective WFP Country Directors has been important to enable WFP's NGO implementing partners to coordinate their programmes with those of the WFP Country offices. As a service to other donors and agencies, WFP has successfully monitored the logistics of their bilateral relief food consignments.
25. In terms of "strategic" benefits, the CLAU operation has contributed to the encouragement of regional cooperation and the build-up of new post-Soviet structures, despite the revival of old conflicts. Indeed, one of the important political achievements of CLAU is that it prompted regular meetings of representatives of the three countries to discuss cross-border logistics arrangements. Likewise, the fact that CLAU successfully obtained from all three countries equal contributions for the construction of the Natenebi bridge in Georgia was remarkable, given the delicate relationship between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Beneficiaries and targeting issues

26. Beneficiaries assisted by WFP comprised refugees (in Armenia only) and IDPs and socially vulnerable people, such as single and disabled pensioners, pregnant and nursing women, social institution inmates, etc. (in all three countries). Selection was largely based on their belonging to a given category without the use of socio-economic criteria to further differentiate between people with varying degrees of socio-economic vulnerability and food insecurity. Despite this, the mission believed that the most vulnerable persons were indeed covered to a large extent, without, however, excluding the possibility that less needy people were assisted.
27. While the extent of vulnerability and need was fairly evident in the case of certain beneficiary categories, it might have varied in the case of others. Thus, destitution was particularly obvious (in all three countries) in the case of IDPs living in poverty conditions and dwelling in overcrowded, run-down public buildings lacking the most basic facilities. By contrast, the level of vulnerability and food insecurity of IDPs living with host families might vary considerably.
28. In spite of variations in terms of food aid need, refined targeting of IDPs (in Azerbaijan) on the basis of socio-economic criteria did not seem to be a major concern, since it was assumed by the WFP country office that "the majority of WFP beneficiaries fall into the primary category of homogeneous food-insecure persons". On the other hand, the WFP office's efforts to verify the IDP status of beneficiaries and to avoid "fraud" and duplication have been intense and successful.

time for wagons was reduced from 34 days in 1994 to around 20 days in 1996. Transit times for trains to the Armenian or Azerbaijan borders also improved, from 12-13 days to less than two days in 1996.



29. Refugees and IDPs in Armenia were selected by UNHCR and the Department of Refugee Affairs and Migration (DRAM), more on the basis of documents confirming their status than on the basis of socio-economic criteria. In addition, procedures for the preparation of lists did not always exclude possibilities of double registration. However, efforts were initiated (in Armenia) to register all refugees and IDPs in the PAROS¹ system. By using the system's vulnerability threshold, screening of target groups would be refined.
30. Beneficiary selection in the vulnerable groups was based largely on the social welfare categories of the former Soviet system; respective lists provided by the authorities in the three countries were used by the humanitarian organizations and WFP for food distribution. These lists seem to have served their purpose at the onset of the relief operation, as there was sufficient correlation between these categories and food insecurity to justify their use. However, there might have been some misunderstanding on the part of the authorities, as some beneficiary categories (such as war veterans) were automatically entitled to certain benefits but not to food aid under WFP's stricter criteria.
31. The usefulness of the former categories has increasingly been questioned by the humanitarian aid community, as they do not reflect the degree of food insecurity and poverty of the individual household. At the same time, reduced availability of food aid made efficient targeting ever more important, both to cover the needs of the most vulnerable people at the best possible level and to maintain donor confidence. As a consequence, a number of surveys and studies were initiated to improve targeting², some with WFP support, particularly in Armenia (PAROS) and Georgia.
32. The surveys were to provide further insight into the socio-economic conditions of the vulnerable groups and to help establish the criteria for the selection of the most food insecure people. However, they focused on different criteria (food vulnerability, nutritional vulnerability, health risks, housing, etc.), different target groups and different survey areas, which makes a comparison of the results difficult. Besides, it was doubtful whether most of them could provide a direct basis for establishing individual distribution lists. The mission considered that a census-type survey (addressing the entire population of an area or even of the entire country, not only a sample), involving governmental and other local structures, was necessary to ensure equitable distribution.

¹ Funded by USAID and supported by WFP, the Government of Armenia has developed a computerised data collecting and processing system (PAROS) to assess relative vulnerability (poverty) in the country and to ensure an equitable system for the distribution of humanitarian aid. (At the time of the mission, the third of four project phases had commenced). Unit of assessment is the family household. Families considering themselves in need are asked to register and provide socio-economic and other data, which are collected on village and district levels by the Department of Social Welfare. Based on this data and a mathematical model developed at the Institute of Computer Research and Development in Yerevan, the relative vulnerability of families is assessed considering the following variables: (1) social group of the different household members, (2) family size, (3) formal and informal income from employment, land, humanitarian aid and other sources, (4) housing condition and (5) place of residence. The higher the index thus obtained on the scale, the more vulnerable the household is considered to be. By June 1996, almost 80 percent of all families had registered; 20 percent corresponding to 95,000 households were rated most vulnerable, scoring above 39 points. PAROS can identify sub-groups and therefore serves as an instrument to identify target groups for different types of assistance; a number of aid organizations were already using the lists produced by PAROS.

² Studies and surveys by IRCF, CARE, AICF, ACTS/GEORGIA and ECHO/DHA/Save the Children. At the time of the mission, most were still in process or about to be published.



33. Nevertheless, efforts were undertaken to arrive at individualised beneficiary lists such as the vulnerability survey undertaken in some districts of Georgia¹, which was to provide a reliable basis for direct distribution by WFP in the country. As the system also has the potential to be used for a revised social welfare system and health security schemes, it might be a good example (like PAROS in Armenia) of how relief can be linked with more sustainable structures of a social security net.

Monitoring Issues

34. Regular monitoring of WFP food aid activities in the three countries, in addition to specific tasks involving CLAU, includes control of commodity transport from EDPs to distribution sites and verification of actual distribution to beneficiaries, as well as quantity, quality and use of food received.
35. By contrast, monitoring of the impact and effects of food aid on the beneficiaries is not apparently considered a priority and is rarely done,² which might be understandable at the initial stage of an emergency operation. The PAROS system can be a useful instrument for monitoring the impact of food and other targeted humanitarian aid over time; for instance, the average score of beneficiaries on its poverty and food insecurity scale could be an indicator for the success of an operation. However, it should be taken into account that better monitoring of continued eligibility of beneficiaries and effects of food aid requires a certain continuity in programme and donor support, which was not always guaranteed, given the often irregular and insufficient donations.
36. Particularly in Azerbaijan, beneficiary eligibility was monitored on the basis of documents verifying status (e.g. refugees). Logistics and distribution processes were also monitored by way of a comprehensive control card system that prevents, to a high degree, multiple registration and fraud. By contrast, neither monitoring of poverty levels of beneficiaries nor of impact is deemed feasible on the grounds that the operation still has an emergency connotation with limited scope for longer-term objectives. Also, staffing constraints were mentioned, particularly in case of increased implementation directly by WFP.

Direct Implementation (DI) by WFP

37. There had been pressure on WFP, for reasons of cost-effectiveness, greater visibility vis-à-vis the beneficiaries and the possibility of better control of all steps of the operation, to implement the food aid operation directly and not through implementing partners (IPs). DI of the logistic and distribution aspects beyond the EDPs seems to allow for certain flexibility in warehousing and transportation that IPs, with sometimes conflicting interests in pursuit of their own programmes, might not achieve. As observed in Armenia and Azerbaijan, which had already initiated DI, it can result in lower costs per ton and, consequently, in savings on LTSH. However, DI might require that the food pipeline be guaranteed for a minimum period (four to five months) to avoid a risk of cost overruns

¹ "Social Passport System" exercise undertaken by the Kutesi Doctor's Association/ACTS and strongly supported by the local Government and WFP. It is a selective census based on old beneficiary lists and poor households that want to register. PAROS and other survey experience is taken into account.

² With the exception, perhaps, of one of WFP's implementing partners, Women Aid, in Armenia.



caused by erratic hiring of personnel and leasing of equipment. However, first experiences have demonstrated a tighter control on the operation, including reporting.

Phasing out

38. At the time of the mission, there were no indications in the three countries of sustained economic recovery nor significant improvements in access to food of large parts of the population. To phase out food aid did not seem justifiable under these circumstances until the economy picks up. At the same time, more food-security-oriented targeting would help to identify the most vulnerable households while taking account of eventual sectorial improvements. To this effect, results expected from various surveys and data analyses (mainly in Georgia and Armenia) could prove useful.
39. To prepare the ground for phasing out in the longer term, Food for Work (FFW) and other income-generating activities seem to be viable alternatives to free food distribution. Experience gained in Armenia and impressions from interviews with beneficiaries suggest sufficient scope and interest to undertake such schemes. In Armenia, small community-based FFW schemes involved unemployed and under-employed persons in some 300 mini-projects (rehabilitation and repair of buildings, infrastructure and irrigation canals; garbage collection; and reforestation). Although a new experience, FFW has been widely accepted, apparently because of the level of destitution and decreased coping strength of large parts of the population. Although such a program presents a number of benefits, management and monitoring intensity imposed by numerous FFW sites should not be underestimated. Nor does FFW necessarily cover the most needy ones, as it is targeted to the able-bodied.
40. As to the CLAU activities, the mission considered that the operation had fulfilled its immediate purpose to rehabilitate the logistics network and to facilitate delivery of food aid. However, as it had produced further-reaching development benefits, phasing out would have to be a controlled process to protect such effects. Abrupt cessation of the CLAU activities would leave a vacuum which other development agencies - at the time of the mission - were not yet in a position to fill. Therefore, measures would have to be taken to "institutionalise" the re-established coordination of port and rail operations as well as the technical coordination through the Rail Operations Centre. Though the necessity of continuing coordination was understood at the regional level, the three governments and most donors believed that the political will to do so, in the absence of an "umbrella institution" such as WFP/CLAU, would not suffice without strong commitments agreed upon between the three republics. Sharing the same concerns, the mission concluded that technical assistance should ensure that an institution such as CLAU is left behind before CLAU's withdrawal to bridge the gap between emergency and development. Otherwise, the goodwill generated by WFP through CLAU could be at risk. It is therefore conceivable that CLAU participation in monitoring and coordination could continue for a period even beyond the termination of WFP food aid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

41. The mission's major recommendations are summarized as follows:

Food Assistance

42. To contribute to the social stabilisation and to mitigate risks of malnutrition and hunger, WFP food aid should continue. To cope with limited resources and to provide a reliable



level of assistance to the most needy, targeting should be strengthened with a sharper focus on food insecurity and taking into account the findings of various vulnerability studies in its fine-tuning efforts. At the same time, possibilities for further FFW programs and other income-generating activities should be explored in order to decrease free distribution and prepare the ground for longer-term phasing out.

43. Qualitative monitoring should be stepped up; increased monitoring of beneficiaries' eligibility and vulnerability as well as the effects of food aid would foster the credibility of the operation. Problems of limited staff resources can be overcome by increased use of techniques of Rapid Appraisal and random sample surveys.

Logistics Operation

44. To assist in the transition phase, CLAU should maintain a presence in the Caucasus for an additional 12 months (approximately until end 1997), eventually through the WFP Country Office in Tbilisi. CLAU should identify developmental activities in the transport sector to be taken up after its withdrawal by the appropriate (investment) agencies. This would enable a more solid transition to development, since other programmes envisaged for the transport sector - at the time of the mission - seemed rather uncertain.
45. In the same context, CLAU could promote, with the appropriate agencies, a series of studies on a comprehensive "Programme for Transport Sector Recovery", including a "Railway Restructuring Project" component and a "Port Modernisation Project" in light of increased competition from road transport as well as an expected increase in container traffic for which both port and rail are not yet prepared. Likewise, CLAU should, to the extent possible, identify the technical assistance required for the establishment of commercial operating principles for both port and rail throughout the region. This would contribute to sustaining the operations through proper maintenance and renewal of infrastructure and equipment.
46. The Railway Operations Centre should be maintained despite the eventual withdrawal of WFP/CLAU assistance. CLAU should ensure through the preparation of Draft Agreements that all the parties concerned are committed to this endeavour. The operational procedures regarding coordination, monitoring, tracking etc. should be formalised in an "Operation Centre Manual" to avoid the loss of valuable knowledge after CLAU's withdrawal. In addition, the manual would be useful for the further development of the railway and transport sectors in the region.

LESSONS LEARNED

Food assistance

47. The operation appears to a large extent as a logistics and transport undertaking in which the activity to get food to target beneficiaries almost replaces any other objective. In the absence of reliable vulnerability/food insecurity surveys, the role food aid has played for survival tends to be underrated. This is a recurrent problem in emergency relief operations, and WFP would have to expend more effort on being able to better demonstrate the effect of its food aid on the beneficiaries.
48. Emergency relief operations can be perceived and treated like other projects in terms of the need for well defined goals, objectives and indicators to measure achievements. WFP, as food aid co-ordinator with important catalytic functions on food aid issues, should also



put itself in the lead of the required methodological and organizational developments. Efforts initiated by WFP to work on more precise definitions and performance indicators for emergency food aid operations point in the right direction.

49. WFP has a great interest in vulnerability and food security surveys for targeting purposes. It should not leave this important field exclusively to others and should be even more actively involved in the execution as well as coordination of such surveys. This would also enhance WFP's legitimacy as food aid co-ordinator, which often focuses primarily on information-sharing and logistics.

Logistics

50. The CLAU operation has shown the importance of prior planning of logistics operations. In this context, rapid assessment missions - where possible - of the transport infrastructure, prior to the initiation of WFP food relief operations, are useful. They help in determining the level of resource mobilization required for logistics and in early identification and strengthening of weak links in the delivery chain of relief aid.
51. Likewise, the establishment of CLAU-type coordination mechanisms makes the flow of food aid less erratic and less costly, and reduces losses, thus ensuring a better chance of donor confidence and continued support.
52. The great advantage of a CLAU-like operation is its ability to achieve results under difficult conditions. Under WFP's mandate, a coordinating unit can act swiftly and efficiently when there is a perceived logistical shortfall, but can also reach out into development, as has been demonstrated during the current transition period. However, development has been a by-product, not the determinant, for the CLAU operation. In future WFP logistics operations, the longer-term development potential they might have for the transport sector should be fully acknowledged and actively pursued at an early stage.
53. The Caucasus operation has demonstrated that WFP can take the lead in coordinating and monitoring emergency logistics and transport operations. However, the issue of WFP's possible range of mandates is still contentious. It has not yet been widely accepted that a) logistics might be a legitimate function for WFP and not necessarily subordinated to its food aid mandate; and b) when pursuing complex transport/logistics activities beyond the immediate emergency phase, WFP is not merely intruding into the field of other agencies but, on grounds of proven expertise, might have a genuine role in the transition from relief to development.
54. WFP performance in logistics operations has demonstrated a degree of expertise that could be properly marketed. As the logistics advisor and food coordinator in a number of emergency operations, WFP has built up a reputation for rapid response and delivery of relief food. It thus enjoys a comparative advantage over other agencies in this field. Greater acknowledgement of this specific capability could enable WFP to expand its scope of operations and its appeal to the donor community. On the basis of the Caucasus experience, WFP should consider the merits of establishing a logistics capability that could operate independently from the level of its own relief food distribution in a given case, if so requested by donors.



