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COUNTRY STRATEGY OUTLINES

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COUNTRY STRATEGY OUTLINE— BENIN

ABSTRACT

Benin is classified as both a least developed country (LDC) and low-income, food-deficit country (LIFDC). It has a per capita gross national product (GNP) of about 350 dollars a year, and an infant (0 to 5 years) mortality rate of 87 per 1,000 in 1994. In 1997 UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) placed Benin 146th in the total list of countries.

The strategy proposed in this document aims at redirecting WFP assistance to areas and population groups which are a priority on account of poverty or nutritional vulnerability. The programme orientation will favour the development of human resources rather than of infrastructure. Food aid will contribute directly to the well-being of targeted populations, especially children, rural women and groups marginalized through the rural exodus/urban drift. A participatory approach will be used to involve the communities concerned in project formulation, and communities will play an active part in project implementation.

WFP assistance will no longer be exclusively managed by the Government of Benin but will increasingly involve NGOs whose activities among beneficiary communities will optimize the usefulness of food aid as a vector for development. WFP will also coordinate its assistance with that of bilateral and multilateral donors. The future WFP Country Programme will be integrated in the master development plan which was being set up within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), at the time this document was being prepared.

Special efforts will be needed by all those taking part in this programme to ensure much greater efficiency in logistics and food management, and in the project monitoring and reporting system.

Within this framework the total volume of resources envisaged may vary between a minimum of 2,500 tons a year and a maximum of 5,000 tons for an operational cost varying between 500 and 600 dollars a ton.

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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted for consideration to 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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INTRODUCTION

Geography

1. Stretching in a north-south direction between Niger, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Togo, the Republic of Benin covers 112,622 square kilometres with the Atlantic Ocean forming its southern coastline. From north to south the longest distance is 670 kilometres while the breadth of the country varies from 320 km in the north to 120 km in the south. Most of the country is subject to subtropical conditions of a type known as the Benin Variant and the rains are less abundant than those occurring in other regions at this same latitude. From November to early April there is a dry season with the rainy season spanning late April through October. The coastal area has special characteristics: there is a long dry season from November until the end of March, a wet season from April to July with a short season (August to October) of alternating wet and dry weather conditions.

BACKGROUND

2. The country achieved independence in 1960 under the name Dahomey and has been called Benin since 1975. There was a period of political instability up to 1972 when a Marxist-oriented army take-over occurred. Successive attempts from 1972 to 1989 to transform the economy and adapt Benin society to Marxism-Leninism only succeeded in impoverishing the country. In 1990 a national conference brought the military regime to a peaceful end and organized the transition to democracy. Fresh presidential elections took place in 1996 without any problem.

Population

3. The population was estimated at 5.8 million in 1997 with the largest concentration of people being in the south of the country. The capital, Cotonou, has over 550,000 inhabitants while Porto Novo and Abomey have 300,000 and 90,000 respectively. According to UNDP statistics, population growth will increase from 2.5 percent for the period 1960–1994 to 2.8 percent for the period 1994–2020. The total population of the country in the year 2020 will reach 10 million and that of Cotonou three million.

Macro-economic context

4. Classified as both LDC and LIFDC, Benin stands in the 146th position in the HDI list for 1997. The GNP in 1994 (latest figure available) was around two thousand million dollars or 350 dollars a head, while economic growth was slightly negative in relation to population growth (-0.3 percent to -0.4 percent a year). According to the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis (INSAE), the poverty threshold is around 94 dollars a year in rural Benin and about 240 dollars in urban areas. A structural adjustment programme has been going on since 1989 and is now in its third phase, covering the years 1996 to 1998. That programme aims to reduce state expenditures and put the national budget on a sound footing. Benin is now firmly committed to relaunching the private sector; this clearly has the support of the donor community. Since 1992, their support has been between 280 and 300 million dollars a year; most of which has been spent on infrastructure, health and education. The evolution of the gross domestic product (GDP),



which was fairly slow until 1994, seems to be speeding up and the most recent increase was around two percent, although still below the population growth rate in a country where almost half the population is under 14.

National resources

5. Agriculture, responsible for over one third of the GDP, is the main economic activity. Food crops are the main crops: sweet potatoes, cassava, maize, millet and sorghum. The main cash crops are cotton, groundnuts, palms and tobacco. Cotton is the most important export crop. Although the country has a seaboard, fishing only involves a small portion of the population and total catches are modest in size. Exploitation of the forest cover is similarly limited. Petroleum has been produced since 1982 but production has been stagnating at a low level for some years. Industry accounts for 15 percent of the GDP and mainly consists of processing local raw materials. Economic development has been slowed by lack of investment, inadequate infrastructure and limited outlets. The largest share of economic activity for the population lies in the informal or the undeclared sector. In Benin and neighbouring countries the informal sector is both complex and well organized, providing incomes and jobs for the active population not engaged in farming or agriculture.

FOOD INSECURITY AND THE HUNGRY POOR

Food insecurity at the national level

6. Statistics available for Benin are not always up to date or completely reliable. Poverty mapping has yet to be carried out, the agricultural statistics are too general in character and it is difficult to find appropriate nutrition surveys carried out at the local level. It can be stated empirically that while Benin is overall self-sufficient in food, this self-sufficiency is fragile, and imbalances remain between regions and between various communities. Furthermore, it is far from sure that national food production can progress as fast as, or faster than, population growth. Many pockets of food insecurity exist owing to the inadequacy of agricultural skills, production problems, difficulties in marketing local surpluses and to poverty. The national food production index has shifted from a base of 100 in 1981 to 119 in 1993 (latest available figure). According to UNDP's HDI for 1992, there were 2,532 kilocalories a day available for each inhabitant—only slightly above the FAO minimum recommended 2,400 kilocalories daily.
7. It is estimated that the threshold below which a person would be unable to meet his food needs would be 65 dollars a year in rural areas and 110 dollars in the urban context. According to figures from INSAE, around 34 percent of the country's inhabitants subsists below these thresholds. The FAO Aggregate Household Food Security Index is 83.1 for the period 1993–95, thus placing Benin among the upper rankings for countries in the region.
8. In 1996, agriculture accounted for 35 percent of the GDP and involved 65 percent of the population. Over the last five years the national per capita figures on food production showed cereal production to be stable, a routine increase in root crops (which have a lower nutrition value) and stable figures for pulses. Growth in production has been hampered by unfavourable weather conditions, the low level of skills among producers, the shortage and high cost of agricultural inputs, and the fact that effective control and management of water has not been achieved. The prospect for substantial progress in the field of agriculture



remains limited for structural reasons: there is no rural land registration code, agricultural credits to small farmers are non-existent and some areas are completely isolated.

9. It is hard to assess the degree of the country's self-sufficiency owing to the fact that it has open frontiers with neighbouring countries, thus favouring significant trade exchanges in both goods and agricultural produce in both directions. This situation means that any structural or temporary problem affecting agriculture and food marketing in bordering countries will automatically have repercussions in Benin. In 1997, the country had officially imported (through its Atlantic ports) a total of 128,000 tons of cereals (two thirds in rice and one third in wheat or flour) of which a substantial portion was re-exported to these neighbouring countries. It is, however, impossible to judge how much was re-exported. These food imports represent 18 percent of the value of all commercial imports to the country.

Geographical analysis

10. The western part of the Atacora district, the north-eastern part of Borgou and northern Zou (see maps annexed to this document) are the areas most deficient in food production. These areas suffer from unfavourable climatic and soil conditions. The south of the country, although more fertile, suffers from a lack of cultivable land in relation to the much higher population density than that pertaining in the northern half. In the three departments of the south (which are the most highly populated) the land area available for cropping varies between 0.25 and 0.5 hectares per family.
11. In areas where more land is available, production is affected by the irregular rainfall precipitations which characterize two thirds of the country, by the fact that agricultural inputs are provided almost exclusively for the cotton cash crop (central and northern areas of Borgou north, the north of the department of Zou and eastern parts of Atacora), and that agricultural extension work and credits as well as marketing are concentrated in these same three areas. Diversity in food consumption habits also explains regional differences: to the south and central southern areas, consumer preference is for maize, complemented by cassava and sweet potatoes; in the central northern parts, however, cassava and sweet potato are more widely consumed. In the north the basic foodstuff is sweet potato which is complemented by cassava, millet and sorghum. Food production is at a particular disadvantage in areas where cotton is under intensive cultivation; even so, the cash income from cotton does not bring much benefit to the poorest families.

Targeting food aid

12. In the intermediate situation pertaining to Benin, a degree of selectivity in the provision of food aid—based on economic and social criteria—has to be exercised. The strategy will adopt dual criteria for the selection of beneficiary groups:
 - a) **nutrition criteria:** groups with a per capita food consumption well below 2,400 kilocalories a day; and
 - b) **income criteria:** the poorest groups (as defined by the country's Directorate of Agriculture and Applied Nutrition) who spend more than 70 percent of their total income on food.
13. In geographical terms these dual criteria would cover a) subsistence farming zones where there are no cash crops or other sources of income; and b) peri-urban zones around the towns of Cotonou, Porto Novo and Abomey where many families are living below the poverty threshold.



14. In sociological terms these groups include:
- a) small farmers and their families whose production does not cover household requirements (located in western Atacora, north-eastern Borgou, northern Zou and some sub-prefectures of Ouémé and Mono);
 - b) children in these same districts whose schooling is interrupted (permanently or temporarily) on account of family poverty;
 - c) women in the poorest rural areas who engage in small-scale farming (located in the same areas as a) above);
 - d) newly born babies and infants under five suffering from nutritional deficiencies; and
 - e) people living in the peri-urban belts around the big towns (this group is mainly made up of former peasants who have drifted towards the towns).
15. Among the poor, special attention will be paid to poorly educated women who, because of certain structural problems and traditional practices which discriminate against them, have less access to the advantages bestowed by economic growth. Sources of independent income for women are very limited; they usually find employment in the least well paid sectors of petty trading and subsistence farming. Their access to land is restricted—partly through custom and laws governing land ownership, but also because of many structural problems. A significant number of households are headed by women: 23 percent in urban areas and 14 percent in rural areas.
16. Women heads of household include widows, single mothers and the wives of men who have gone away to seek work in neighbouring countries.

GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES AND POLICIES ADDRESSING FOOD SECURITY

17. In spite of some encouraging results, the programme of economic reform that began in the early nineties has not so far had any decisive effect on the precarious living conditions of most people who find themselves marginalized and untouched by the development process. To put this right, in seeking sustainable human development solutions, the Government has designated the fight against poverty and creation of job opportunities as basic objectives—giving them the same importance as sustained economic growth and a reduction in financial imbalances.

Food security

18. The Government has not always had a clear-cut strategy for food security, and concepts regarding food security and food aid have sometimes been mixed up. Thanks to the preparations undertaken for implementing UNDAF, and the recent completion of a common country assessment undertaken by the Government and the United Nations system, there is now a clearer understanding of concepts.
19. During this evolving situation, government policy in the field of food security is to satisfy the basic needs of the population through an increase in food production and the fight against poverty. This dual strategy involves, among other things:
- a) diversification of crops;
 - b) education of between 40 and 50 percent of children of school age—mainly girls who have not been going to school;



- c) integration of women in the development process;
- d) development of basic social services; and
- e) restoration of the environment.

This strategy implies a major investment effort across several sectors, including those which are either barely, or not at all, economically viable.

Food aid balance sheet

20. Between 1988 and 1997 Benin received a total of 72,267 tons of food aid from WFP, making an annual average delivery level of 7,226 tons. Food aid from other sources totalled 113,399 tons over the same period, averaging out at 11,340 tons a year. Thus, WFP assistance amounted to 64 percent of total food aid received, with substantial variations on a yearly basis depending on the projects' level of execution. Emergency assistance provided in response to natural disasters has been modest as Benin is not much exposed to large-scale disasters.
21. World economic difficulties, and the increased demand for aid occasioned by the numerous conflict situations that have arisen in Africa, have meant that the principal donors have redirected their food aid to those zones where humanitarian crises are more acute. Project food aid to Benin is provided only by WFP, while only one bilateral donor gives regular programme food aid (in the order of 3,000 to 5,000 tons annually). This bilateral aid is for consumption mainly in the two principal towns.
22. Food aid suffers from the fact that it is not yet integrated within an overall policy but is often simply managed on a short-term basis according to its availability from the donors and their particular agenda.

Future role of food aid

23. The country's self-sufficiency in food remains fragile and may be skewed by population growth or temporary and unpredictable circumstances. The weak purchasing power of the poorest of the poor means, moreover, that they are not in a position to buy food on the local market. In this regard, food aid plays a role in complementing other forms of development assistance and in support of local initiatives at the village level. On the other hand, programmes based only on food aid without complementary inputs in human investment, technical skills, funding, etc., would have little chance of achieving significant and sustainable results.
24. Looking at the trends over recent years, both in Benin and other developing countries, the outlook for external aid other than food suggests it will be more likely to decrease than increase. This kind of external aid seems increasingly subject to tight cost-effectiveness conditions, and will be targeted to selected groups to achieve higher returns. The poorest people in the most difficult areas, who have neither the investment capacity nor the skills necessary to show good returns on this type of aid, will rarely benefit.
25. Food aid, being less subject to such constraints, will be much more appropriate for schemes offering low and slow returns, with distribution targeted to communities that have been sensitized to the value of the food. Technical and monetary aid programmes are more likely to be targeted to coastal areas and cotton-growing zones, and to regions that are easy to reach, whereas food aid will more likely be attributed to marginal areas and the 34 percent of the population which is economically and nutritionally vulnerable (as described in the previous section).



ASSESSMENT OF WFP'S PERFORMANCE TO DATE

26. WFP assistance to Benin dates back to 1964; its total value is estimated at about 78 million dollars for 125,000 tons of commodities, of which 78 percent was for development and 22 percent for emergency operations (refugees, localized floods, rainfall deficits).
27. Between 1964 and 1990 WFP favoured multipurpose development projects concerned with training, reforestation and community infrastructure, and which covered the entire country. This assistance was later retargeted towards the less fortunate and more difficult areas. The multipurpose approach permitted a lot of leeway in targeting, choice of activities and management but the advantages tended to be outweighed by the lack of clear priorities and fragmentation of efforts, various interministerial rivalries and a certain amount of confusion regarding their responsibilities.
28. The ongoing assistance includes school feeding and a sub-project for rural development and food security.

Project Benin 5208—School canteens and assistance to the education sector

29. This project began in 1994 with a planned duration of four years; it was subsequently extended in time to the end of the school year 1998/99 without an increase in resources. The objectives are to increase school enrolment and attendance frequency rates, with special priority accorded to girls. Within the project framework, WFP also supports schemes to provide boarding facilities to make girls' attendance at school easier. A tripartite selection committee (composed of WFP, the Government and representatives of local communities) carries out an annual review of the list of participating schools, examining the degree of participation by parents, the achievement of project objectives, the length of time WFP has been assisting them and the quality performance shown by beneficiaries in managing the assistance. This process facilitates the targeting of the project to the most deserving areas.
30. This project, with an average of 55,000 beneficiaries a year, was evaluated in 1997. The mission recommended an expansion, with a strengthening of beneficiary targeting, increased participation by the parents in running the canteens and the distribution of dry rations to girls in primary education to stimulate their attendance and learning capacity. There is little realistic prospect of the Government itself being able to take over the school canteens in the medium term.

Project Benin 5215—Multi-purpose rural development and support for food security

31. This project began in June 1994 with a planned duration of four years, but will be extended in time until December 1999. Its aim is to improve the living conditions of the poorest people through implementing schemes to improve the efficiency of peasant farmers, increase food production, protect the natural habitat and promote village infrastructure. Project resources are allocated on the basis of 46 percent to support village groups, 20 percent to develop and repair rural infrastructure, 30 percent to forestry development and four percent to establish cereal banks in the Atacora and Borgou districts.
32. With the exception of the sub-project for cereal banks, the project is not concentrated in one particular region but covers the entire country. This sub-project could not really begin



until 1997 with the arrival of the Dutch voluntary service staff. Examining the project as a whole, the various project outputs have either reached the targets, or exceeded them in the case of the maintenance, and opening up, of rural dirt roads but were below planned objectives in respect of water control works and the sinking of wells. Dirt roads in rural areas have to be repaired after each rainy season; these perennial activities seem questionable. Support to community groups seeking to improve their incomes and living conditions (through processing and marketing farm produce) has had a high success rate, exceeding the initial objectives as over 26,000 persons have already been beneficiaries. The number of women's groups which benefit has now increased overall after improvements to the targeting methodology.

Strengths and weaknesses in implementation

33. Certain problems common to all the WFP-assisted projects in Benin have sometimes limited the real usefulness of activities undertaken and reduced their impact on the country's economic and social development. These are:
- a) **Absence of a strategy.** Prior to 1997, the multipurpose activities aimed to respond to overall national priorities for rural development and for education. Selection criteria were not always vigorously defined and the wide-ranging nature of objectives and resources tended to weaken the impact of the various sub-projects.
 - b) **Geographical spread.** WFP projects covered too great an area of the country, sometimes benefiting zones that were well off to the detriment of the poorest ones. This wide dispersal of activities led to disproportionately high management and logistics costs in relation to the outputs.
 - c) **Absence of social targeting.** Whatever the project, the choice of beneficiary groups and communities was sometimes not selective enough or choices were made based on opportunity rather than a rigorous identification of malnutrition or pockets of poverty.
 - d) **Government commitment.** The Government has not always been able to provide the investments necessary to invigorate projects and give technical support; food aid has not always been thought of as a strategic priority. The involvement of too many different administrations and organizations at the national and local level has sometimes complicated project implementation. In general, however, it must be recognized that the authorities fulfilled their obligations for the receipt, storage, forwarding and internal transport of commodities and their distribution to beneficiary areas.
 - e) **Investments and technical counterpart obligations.** The state budget has rarely contributed to funding the technical inputs needed for activities concerned with rural development or education. Monetization of WFP-supplied commodities (rice and wheat) for the two projects described above should have helped to overcome the gap in inputs. However, this had only limited success owing to late arrival of the commodities, the narrow market for imported cereals and the technical complexity of managing this type of operation. Although funds were generated through the sales, the cost/benefit ratio of the operations seems somewhat negative.
 - f) **Monitoring and evaluation (M&E).** The limited means at the disposal of WFP's country office in Benin do not allow it to take on a constant and rigorous M&E programme. This function should be carried out by government counterpart staff. In practice, counterpart personnel have not been able to honour these obligations in full



owing to the lack of adequate human and financial resources, compounded by the lack of a methodology and strategy suited to local conditions.

- g) **Logistics.** Notwithstanding the long distances along the north-south axis of the country and intermittent problems concerning the state of the roads, railway connections, storage conditions and the well-worn trucks that WFP had supplied, the transportation and distribution of commodities to most project activities have always been carried out well, with only minimal losses and for a reasonable cost in comparison with average regional transport costs.

FUTURE ORIENTATION OF WFP ASSISTANCE

General framework

34. WFP's options in Benin are many and varied; until the Country Programme has been prepared, these options should remain open. The programme should, however, follow certain key lines.

Integration with UNDAF

35. The harmonization and integration of United Nations assistance to Benin is just beginning. The first step was the completion of the common country analysis due to be finalized towards the end of 1998. The conclusions of this analysis will be taken into account and put into practice in WFP's Country Programmes.

Harmonization and implementation of programme cycles

36. The Country Strategy Note (CSN) adopted by the Council of Ministers on 8 January 1997 provides the framework for the United Nations system for the years 1997–2001. The activities which will be included in the future Country Programme will cover the years 1999–2001, so as to allow UNDP, WFP and other participating agencies to synchronize their planning cycles and establish linkages between their fields of action.

Geographical targeting

37. In the framework of its future Country Programme, WFP will concentrate its interventions on those areas where, according to national statistics, the greatest percentage of the population live below the poverty threshold. These areas comprise Atacora, north-eastern Borgou, northern Zou and possibly the belts of acute poverty around the three urban agglomerations. The choice of regions will be confirmed at the time the Country Programme is prepared, when a mission will carry out vulnerability analysis and mapping.

Target groups—the social context and women

38. The problems associated with poverty and malnutrition in Benin are not generally understood and the data available are either out of date or incomplete. It is, however, clear that in the poorest areas women and girls find themselves in a worse situation than those living in areas where there is a moderate income. In rural regions it is the women who find themselves at a particular disadvantage, hampered by difficulties in gaining access to credit facilities, by the unfavourable system of land registration/ownership and by illiteracy. The future Country Programme (CP) will envisage possible ways for WFP to support action to



resolve these issues. When preparing the CP, WFP will be able to carry out more detailed surveys regarding women's education and their skills potential.

Intervention in urban areas

39. Rural-urban drift is doubtless as inexorable in Benin as it is elsewhere. Ongoing rural development projects and the new ones already planned will be able to slow down the trend but not bring it to a halt. Tens of thousands of families from rural areas will be settling in peri-urban areas where they will suffer from unemployment, health problems and other social scourges that automatically affect uprooted populations. Preliminary studies for the CP will try to assess whether WFP food assistance could be an appropriate means to mitigate the negative consequences of these internal migrations.

Food for growth

40. For the past 10 years WFP-assisted activities have been concentrated in education and infrastructure; but insufficient attention was paid to nutrition problems, which are obviously present in any LDC. Although the average food intake is slightly above the FAO norm, it is probable that a large part of the population does not reach this level of average intake and so suffers from nutritional deficiencies likely to have serious consequences on growth and well-being; this is especially true for women and children.

Key areas for assistance

41. The areas where WFP will be concentrating its efforts suffer from a multiplicity of problems which food aid alone could not resolve. The future Country Programme will endeavour to concentrate its interventions on sectors where WFP has acquired practical experience with proven results while cautiously trying out assistance in other domains where other aid organizations are not in a position to offer support. The decision on WFP's intervention will be based on an analysis of the comparative advantages of food aid in the relevant sector.
42. **Education, training and literacy.** In spite of very real progress in school attendance, the level in Benin is still not high enough. The net rate (boys and girls), which was 48 percent in 1992, reached 56.01 percent in 1996. Over the same period the rate for boys went up from 60.6 percent to 68.4 percent while that for girls shifted from 33.9 percent to 42.7 percent. At present WFP remains the only donor giving assistance directly to children by means of the school canteens, whereas other donors provide inputs to improve the infrastructure, train teachers and modernize the teaching curriculum. Based on its experience of many years' standing, WFP will continue its food aid to schools, encouraging the local communities and parents' associations to take a more active part in school and canteen management with a view to a gradual phasing out of WFP assistance. Future WFP support to education should be more geographically concentrated, through the selection of beneficiary communities on the basis of their school attendance rates and the level of food deficit. New projects will continue to be formulated in collaboration with UNESCO while the participation of new partners of the NGO type could be sought to develop the project, its M&E, and the training of communities close to the school. In this way, donors committed to the construction or rehabilitation of schools could also synchronize these schemes with WFP assistance. The ongoing collaboration with the World Bank in respect of boarding facilities for girls ought to continue.
43. **Rural development.** Considerable investments are required to improve food production, involving the production infrastructure, processing, rural roads and tracks, protection of the



environment, literacy and organizing cooperatives, especially for women. The role of food aid in such domains needs to be better defined. In cases where food assistance would be appropriate, it should not constitute the main, or sole, intervention but exist in complementarity with other forms of assistance such as technical training, provision of credit inputs, repair and construction of infrastructure, and other activities funded with cash or in-kind contributions. To the extent possible, such complementarity should be sought through association with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) regarding credit facilities and with FAO in its food security programme.

44. **Feeding of vulnerable groups.** Feeding children and vulnerable groups complements school feeding and can play an important role in poverty-stricken areas. Targeted nutrition programmes do, however, necessitate competent and motivated staff to be in place, which government services alone are not in a position to provide. Within UNDAF, collaboration between WFP/UNICEF and WHO could facilitate the identification of needs, definition of strategies and allocation of responsibilities including the necessary investments, while national or international NGOs and the women's groups could ensure implementation of the programme and give support to the relevant communities being mobilized. In this domain, WFP would do better to limit its intervention to a geographical zone, carefully chosen as a result of nutrition and socio-economic surveys and the availability of suitable partners.
45. **Projects in urban areas.** The proportion of the population living in poverty on the edge of the towns is likely to increase and many helpful (though costly) short-term actions could be envisaged in the realm of hygiene, protection of the young, assistance to the sick and infirm, direct aid for the very poorest households, promotion of actions for women, the fight against social ills, etc. Actions like these are not without risk in unstable situations and many donors hesitate to become involved. WFP could study the possibilities for a trial project on a small scale, backed up with support from the United Nations' specialized agencies such as UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO, together with that of voluntary organizations or local NGOs.

Consequences

46. The traditional structures for distributing food aid and implementing projects, based more on the logistics strategy than on development considerations, will be reviewed in consultation with the Government, local communities, other donors and relevant NGOs. A participatory approach will be used in project formulation; this necessitates preliminary research which the reduced number of WFP staff in Benin will not be able to carry out alone. The Country Programme will have to include a budget that will cover the cost of appraisal missions to gather the views of the populations. At the implementation stage, the organization with this responsibility ought to be capable of operating well with the least possible bureaucratic constraints, while at the same time maintaining a dialogue with donors. Some countries in the region already have tripartite arrangements involving Government representatives, WFP and NGOs; these are known as "food aid committees"; although at present concerned with emergency relief and its follow-up, these might serve as models.

Emergency relief

47. Benin does not normally suffer from large-scale natural disasters. In the northern part of the country, periodic deficits in rainfall are recorded in specific zones, while the rivers Mono and Ouémé occasionally cause local flooding when overflowing. The impact of



these events on national food production is very limited and, in principle, does not justify recourse to external aid.

48. Humanitarian disasters affecting the country could arise as a result of serious political troubles in one or more neighbouring countries. Should such problems be very serious or of a prolonged nature, large influxes of people might try to seek temporary refuge in Benin. WFP and other United Nations organizations, donors and NGOs are all aware of these risks, and from time to time revise and update their framework plans for relief assistance.

Resource requirements

49. In both the short and the medium term, the school feeding programme, geographically and socially re-oriented, will remain the main WFP-assisted activity. Depending on the composition of the food basket, the distances to be covered by internal transportation, and ocean freight costs, the volume of commodities for annual delivery to this project would vary between 2,500 and 3,000 tons each year with operating costs of 500 to 600 dollars a ton (an average cost of 1.5 million dollars a year). The overhead costs of internal logistics for any activities situated close to the seaboard will be much less.
50. Depending on the strategies determined in the Benin Country Programme, the country could additionally absorb 2,000 tons a year (worth one million dollars) for a second project located in the remote isolated areas. Benin's classification as LDC/LIFDC means that it is a priority country for receipt of WFP assistance.

RISKS

51. The inherent risks in food aid for Benin are easy to predict and no single one constitutes an insurmountable obstacle to implementing the strategies outlined in this document.
52. **Budgetary constraints.** The Government, still following the SAP, is not in a position to provide counterpart funding for all desirable improvements in food aid management and field project support.
53. **Bureaucratic constraints.** The national authorities exhibit the traditional heavy administrative delays; these slow down or complicate management at several stages of a project—from the time commodities are received, to transport and distribution of the food rations. These aspects reduce the efficiency of the projects without in any way raising questions of their validity.
54. **Logistical problems.** Internal transport of commodities is carried out by a fleet of trucks donated to the Government between 1987 and 1992; replacement by donors of that fleet is by no means certain. Other logistics costs for handling the loading, unloading and storage of food are relatively stable and WFP provides a cash subsidy to meet 50 percent of these costs. The fact that the trucking fleet is now old, together with the proposal for targeting a large number of activities to new geographical areas, will certainly have an effect on the cost described.
55. **Project implementation.** The strategies outlined all involve much greater participation by all agencies in the United Nations system as well as by other partners outside the system. The variety of objectives means that project formulation and implementation will be more complex. Coordination arrangements, and the M&E system, will have to be modified to suit this many-faceted strategy. The greatest risk, however, lies in not finding



the partners essential to implement a Country Programme based on an innovative approach, and so have to continue WFP assistance using outdated methods.



B E N I N

MAP: Distribution of poor population by agro-ecological area and town

