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REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS' FIELD VISIT TO MALI

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INTRODUCTION

1. Between 19–26 June 1999, WFP Executive Board Members representing Belgium, Brazil, Burundi, the People’s Republic of China, Peru, the Republic of the Congo and the Russian Federation visited Mali, the first Sahelian African country to be the object of a visit by a mission charged with reviewing the progress of projects being implemented in the country, in line with Executive Board policy.
2. The mission followed a full programme drawn up in advance by the WFP Regional Bureau, which we wish to thank for its dynamism. The following projects were selected for mission visits in three regions—Mopti, Gao and Timbuktu:

Mopti region:

- QAP 5941: School canteens
- PRO 5804: Food for work, food for training, vulnerable group feeding

Gao region:

- QAP 5941: School canteens
- PRO 5804: Food for work, food for training, vulnerable group feeding

Timbuktu region:

- QAP 5941: School canteens
- PRO 5804: Food for work, food for training, vulnerable group feeding

3. Generally speaking, the policies and strategies governing WFP’s activities in these regions are aimed at supplying food assistance to meet the following objectives:
 - a) save lives during emergency crises;
 - b) improve the nutritional standards and living conditions of the most vulnerable populations during critical periods in their lives; and
 - c) contribute to the creation of assets and promote the autonomy of poor individuals and communities.
4. Aim of the visit: to observe the work of WFP in Mali and verify whether food assistance supplied by the Programme is well targeted and necessary.
5. Visit: over a period of four days, the mission travelled to the three regions of Mopti, Gao and Timbuktu and visited the following projects:

Mopti:

- school canteen programme
- construction of dam for agricultural production
- logistics base (warehouse facilities for supplies)

Gao:

- construction of dam for agricultural production
- dune fixation



- construction of a protection dike for agricultural production

Timbuktu:

- construction of two schools and a dispensary
 - running a school canteen
 - construction of irrigated village perimeter dam belts
 - women's reforestation works
6. Overall, the mission was very impressed with the work being carried out and the quality of the projects visited, particularly in terms of the effective participation of the populations concerned and the active involvement of the Malian authorities.
 7. This involvement was well illustrated by the sustained attention given to the mission visit by high-level Malian officials.
 8. Members of the mission also recognized that beneficiaries of food assistance had been well selected and that the work carried out was in line with the Malian government's development programme. In addition, they noted that the food assistance supplied had been necessary to support the efforts being made by the government to improve the living conditions of the population and the socio-economic development of the country.
 9. The mission had the privilege of being received twice by the President of the Republic, as well as by the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Economy, Planning and Integration, of Rural Development and Water, of Basic Education, of Foreign Affairs and Malians Overseas, and of Health, Elderly Persons and Solidarity.
 10. Furthermore, the mission appreciated the framework of cooperation characterizing the entire United Nations system operating in Mali on the one hand, and the United Nations system, donors and Government of Mali on the other.
 11. This close cooperation has resulted in effective interventions by both. At the same time, the leading role played by WFP has been unanimously recognized by all, particularly with the framework of the Cereal Market Restructuring Programme.
 12. During the course of various meetings, particularly those with top-level Malian officials, the mission welcomed with satisfaction the deep interest shown by the Government of Mali in WFP's in-country activities. The following points were raised:
 - a) the need to create food reserve stocks for the population in anticipation of flooding of the River Niger;
 - b) the importance of coordination between the government and WFP in carrying out the Programme's various in-country activities;
 - c) the importance of the school canteen programme in raising the child literacy rate, which is one of the lowest in the world, particularly for girls, and guaranteeing their future living conditions; and
 - d) continuing WFP food assistance to Mali as a means of assuring the development of the country.
 13. Other partners indicated their intention to continue close cooperation with WFP.



Observations Following Visits to the Three Regions

14. The population appreciates WFP activities.
15. Particular interest is being shown in reforestation and dune fixation operations for environmental protection and for ensuring the future availability of wood and water for the rural population.
16. Rural populations are interested in continuing the school canteen programme. Active community participation, particularly of women, serves to render these efforts viable.
17. Beneficiaries are actively participating in efforts to improve their living conditions.
18. WFP has successfully targeted the poorest and most vulnerable in the regions visited.
19. Food assistance for the population is of prime importance during the period of flooding of the River Niger.
20. Local authorities are involved in all WFP projects.
21. Desertification poses an enormous problem.
22. Integration among WFP, international and local NGOs and the regional authorities is excellent.
23. There is a lack of international partners interested in the school canteen programme.
24. There is an acute shortage of supplies in regions flooded by the River Niger.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

25. There is effective need for the assistance offered by WFP in the process of development.
26. The government is willing to improve the living conditions of the population as a matter of urgency.
27. The problems the Government of Mali and WFP must face up to are significant.
28. There is a need to increase the assistance directed towards the most vulnerable, women and children in particular.
29. There is a need to increase the participation of rural women in activities and decision-making.
30. The members of the mission would like to warmly thank Mr Jamie Wickens, Regional Director for the Sahel, Mr Mahamat Kasser Badaoui, WFP Representative in Mali and all staff working in Mali for their know-how and support in ensuring the success of the mission.

