

Distribution: General

Date: 21 February 2017

Original: English

Agenda Item 13

WFP/EB.1/2017/13/Rev.1

Other Business

**For information**

Executive Board documents are available on WFP's Website (<http://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

---

## **Report on the Field Visit to Ecuador of the WFP Executive Board**

From 26 November to 2 December 2016, a team of Executive Board members visited Ecuador to observe WFP field operations; observe WFP as a partner to the Government and in the United Nations country team; obtain insight into the implementation of WFP policies and strategies in the field, particularly its cooperative approaches to providing food assistance with the Government; study programming and programme delivery; and discuss the impact of WFP programmes with government and non-government counterparts at all levels. The team focused on the comprehensive approaches adopted, decentralized management of WFP operations in the field, and responses to emerging issues and changing situations.

This report outlines the team's findings, highlighting opportunities related to the country strategic plan (CSP) presented earlier at this session and suggesting ways in which WFP's work in Ecuador could provide lessons for other operations regionally and globally.

The team's overall conclusions were the following: WFP is contributing to Ecuador's life-saving and resilience capability in a number of ways and in certain geographic areas. The CSP should focus on a carefully planned exit strategy with hand-over to local/national ownership.

### **Climate Adaptation – Food Security**

1. On 28 November 2016, the Board team visited a water reservoir built for and with the Tabacundo community north of Quito as part of the “Enhancing Resilience of Communities to the Adverse Effects of Climate Change on Food Security” (FORECCSA) project.
2. The reservoir helps the community improve its crops by ensuring year-round water supply, with technical assistance provided jointly by the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, the local government of Pichincha Province and WFP. Local authorities described WFP's role as essential in bridging the disconnect between the local and national levels of governance in Ecuador.
3. The Board team's reactions to the project were mixed, with some members feeling it was a justifiable part of WFP's programme in a middle-income country such as Ecuador, while others were concerned that such projects tended to be funded by pooled contributions or required bilateral fundraising by the country office through direct engagement with non-traditional donors. Another factor for discussion was that while WFP's new Integrated Road Map emphasizes adherence to the humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality, projects may also – or

---

#### **Focal point:**

Ms H. Spanos  
Secretary to the Executive Board  
Executive Board Secretariat Division  
tel.: 066513-2603

instead – be aligned with development principles, depending on the country or the context. For example, in the FORECCSA development project, which targets 500 communities in 50 parishes, beneficiary selection criteria were based on vulnerability and determined from two studies carried out prior to the design of the project. This issue merits monitoring by the Board as the CSPs are introduced.

### ***Points for Reflection***

- Ecuador's status as a middle-income country raises issues regarding the need for an exit strategy for many of WFP's projects there.
- When a country strategic plan is being developed, who funds the studies that underpin the national zero hunger strategic review?
- United Nations collaboration during the earthquake response may not have fit perfectly with the traditional roles of the respective agencies, but there was solid cooperation between WFP and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR). As it evolves, the CSP structure should allow flexibility for roles and channels that suit the country or regional context, build on WFP's comparative advantages and are cost-effective.
- Regarding collaboration among the Rome-based agencies (RBAs), WFP's Ecuador Country Director often also serves as acting country director for the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), which does not have its own international staff in Ecuador. The two agencies co-led the food cluster for the earthquake response. The Board team heard that the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) does not have a presence in Ecuador, but has projects there. This implies that there are opportunities for further RBA collaboration and maximization of the collective strength of United Nations food security agencies in Ecuador.

### **School Feeding**

4. The Board team visited Manuel Freile Larrea School in Magdalena, Zuleta to study a school-based health education and promotion programme with community participation. In the framework of the programme, WFP provides food assistance to improve the diet of children in the most vulnerable families, including internally displaced persons. The school meals supply one third of the children's daily energy needs. WFP provides funds through cash-based transfers (CBTs) to local governments or directly to producers. These transfers are complemented by resources from local governments.
5. In addition to the distribution of school lunches, school feeding activities include hygiene education for the children. To increase their understanding of the quality, healthiness and nutritional values of their food, children are involved in preparing their weekly menu plans. An important part of their nutrition education is the establishment and cultivation of a school orchard, which fits well with government social programmes such as "Growing with Our Children".
6. At the national level, school meals activities in Ecuador are guided and coordinated by the Ministry of Education. The WFP programme is implemented in cooperation with this ministry and in close collaboration with farmer organizations. The school feeding programme engages local communities, and most of the food distributed is produced locally, helping to provide local farmers with a stable income. Indirectly, WFP helps to strengthen farmers' access to other institutional purchasers, such as kindergartens and hospitals, and to regional and local markets. As a result, the farmers involved are reportedly becoming more self-reliant, with more economically sustainable production. WFP activities are aligned and coordinated with programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries.
7. In agreement with the Ministry of Education, WFP plans to hand over the school meals programme to national authorities in 2019.

8. In Imbabura, the Board team visited other facilities for school meals, including a storehouse for food storage and the preparation of school meals. The visit provided a chance for dialogue with parents and teachers on implementation of the programme and the preparation of lunches, and with the Prefect of Imbabura on coordination and joint work. It was also possible to consult representatives of the Ministry of Education regarding the coordination of school feeding activities in northern border areas.

### **First 1,000 Days**

9. In Imbabura Province, the Board team met the Minister of Coordination of Social Development, Gabriela Rosero, and observed feeding and family nutrition training and the distribution of food assistance at a community centre. The Minister distributed a *Paso a Paso* manual for healthy nutrition and, together with the President of the Board and the WFP Country Director in Ecuador, participated in a press conference on how WFP and the ministry work together to improve the nutrition status of families.
10. To overcome malnutrition, the Government of Ecuador works with WFP and other United Nations agencies on the “1,000 days” pilot project in Imbabura. This integrated effort facilitates access to nutritious, healthy, and locally produced foods from smallholder farmer associations. An international 1,000 Days initiative focuses on promoting rapid progress in addressing malnutrition by prioritizing prevention through actions that provide care to pregnant and breastfeeding women and their children during pregnancy and for the first years of the children’s lives.
11. Most of the participants in the nutrition training observed by the Board team were economically marginalized pregnant women and mothers of small children, who were taught about the importance of breastfeeding for up to two years and healthy diets for pregnant and lactating women and children. Trainers also used the opportunity to convey health messages and underlined the importance of following the childhood vaccination programme. At the end of the session, participants were given large bags of food and a nutrition manual by the Minister.
12. The team then visited two women smallholder producers who supply the nutrition programme with horticultural products, and saw a distribution facility/storehouse where food from smallholder producers is sorted and distributed to schools or distribution points such as the community centre visited earlier.
13. The team concluded this had been a good learning experience for observing all the links in a nutrition programme, from local producers to the final target group. However, were their advice requested, team members would emphasize the importance of including men and whole families in nutrition activities and would recommend distributing smaller quantities of food that are easier for the women to carry. This would also provide for more frequent and effective learning opportunities for women and would require a shorter period of food storage. As noted at WFP’s country office in Ecuador: “The promotion of healthy eating habits in family diets is not only the responsibility of the mother, but of both parents.”

### **Refugees and the Use of Cash-Based Transfers**

14. As part of its mission, the Board team visited San Lorenzo in northern Ecuador, where WFP assists more than 650 refugees per month. Ecuador hosts more than 60,000 refugees, including 57,000 from Colombia, according to UNHCR. Over the period from 1989 to 2016, over 230,000 people have sought asylum in Ecuador and most of them were from Colombia.
15. WFP provides refugees with monthly support through electronic vouchers, which they can use to purchase food items in grocery stores. Newcomers receive the equivalent of USD 25.00 for each household member, while other vulnerable populations receive between USD 20.00 and USD 60.00 depending on household size. This support is conditional on beneficiaries’ participation in nutrition training. WFP deliberately selects small stores for this programme, rather than large ones, in order to stimulate the local economy.
16. During the visit, the Board team had the opportunity to interact with refugees at a commercial centre – Mendoza’s Small Market – where they receive their monthly food rations through electronic vouchers. The team observed refugees obtaining food on presentation of their

- electronic cards, which were verified by the shop owner. It is worth mentioning that the food purchased was fresh and nutritious, and some of it was grown locally.
17. The Board team interviewed refugees and other beneficiaries, many of whom had traumatic stories to tell. Several women refugees had been victims of rape or other forms of sexual harassment and violence.
  18. After the distribution process, the Board team noted that the use of electronic vouchers was transparent and efficient, and that beneficiaries were meeting their nutrition needs – one of the main objectives of the programme. Refugees expressed strong appreciation of the support provided by WFP.
  19. The Mayor of San Lorenzo, Gustavo Samaniego, hosted a lunch at which he thanked WFP and its partners, including the Government of Ecuador, for the impressive work they were doing with refugees in his province. He made a passionate appeal to WFP to continue its support and partnerships with other actors.
  20. The team then visited the home of a refugee living with her second husband, her five dependent daughters and sons, and three children from her first marriage and their families, under difficult conditions in an open house where they were highly exposed to mosquitoes. This beneficiary confided that she felt safer in Ecuador than in her native Colombia. Although she was finding the change in diet difficult, she praised WFP for giving her the opportunity to benefit from training in nutrition, which had exposed her and her family to new dietary habits.
  21. The team also met representatives of UNHCR and HIAS (formerly the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), both of which are partnering WFP in work with refugees in Esmeraldas, northern Ecuador. Both representatives appreciated the partnerships with WFP, especially at the local level. Each commended WFP for responding swiftly and in many locations before any other organization, including the Government, arrived.
  22. The Board team visited the Buen Pastor Shelter managed jointly by UNCHR, HIAS and WFP and hosting recently arrived refugees. At the centre, HIAS briefed the team on the training provided to refugees, including in micro-entrepreneurship skills.
  23. The team also heard testimony from a young woman refugee who had arrived at the centre a few days earlier. She was a victim of gender-based violence and had fled Colombia with her daughter. Although she was now a refugee with no clear vision of her future, she remained optimistic about realizing her dream of becoming a doctor.
  24. The Board team was reassured to learn from UNHCR that funds had not been diverted from refugees to address the earthquake emergency. Despite advances in the peace process in Colombia, many of the refugees who spoke to the team expressed no intention of returning there soon. Some refugees, recently arrived, were vehement that they could not return, given ongoing conflict, their perception of danger and the violence they had already experienced.
  25. The team noted with satisfaction the visible and substantive collaboration between the WFP country office and UNHCR, with WFP supporting UNHCR's graduation model through which refugees receive technical and psycho-social assistance to help them integrate into Ecuadorian society. WFP provides support for the food security of refugees while UNCHR ensures skills training and livelihoods.
  26. The team took note of the Government's practical response to the refugee issue.

### ***Recommendation***

27. There is a need to seek partnerships with other agencies or host government services with specialization in Gender-Based Violence and Reproductive Health programming as this appears to be a need especially among young refugee women and is not a WFP core area of expertise.

## Earthquake in Ecuador

28. On 16 April 2016, an earthquake of 7.8 magnitude struck the northern coast of Ecuador leaving at least 663 people dead and 9 missing, with another 113 rescued from the ruins and many buildings, out of which more than 560 schools, damaged or destroyed. The Government declared a state of exception and national emergency in the provinces of Esmeraldas, Guayas, Los Ríos, Manabí, Santa Elena and Santo Domingo. Following a request from the Government, WFP activated a Level 2 emergency response.
29. The team travelled from Mompiche to Pedernales City, one of the cities most affected by the earthquake. The Deputy Mayor of the city accompanied the team members to show them the earthquake damage and describe how WFP and other organizations had assisted local people. The team also met representatives of the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion and the local government of Pedernales before moving on to Manta City, in the area most affected by the earthquake. Team members talked to representatives of local authorities and visited two beneficiary households to learn how WFP and the national social protection system are assisting earthquake victims. The team also discussed the joint work of WFP and the Government and how WFP channels its assistance through the national social protection system – one of the greatest strengths of this emergency response was working through local/national systems, especially important given Ecuador's status as a middle-income country.
30. Based on its visit to affected areas and discussions with WFP staff, local authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the team concluded that WFP had provided a comprehensive response in earthquake-hit areas of Ecuador, and was working jointly with national and local governments to develop more shock-responsive national safety nets and social protection systems.
31. WFP country office staff reported that WFP's emergency food security assessment team had found that two thirds of the population were affected by the earthquake and at serious risk of food insecurity. Shortages of food, drinking water and medical assistance were more acute in the areas most affected.
32. Following the Government's request for assistance, on 22 April 2016 WFP launched an emergency operation (EMOP) until December 2016 and a logistics special operation (SO) for three months, from April to July 2016. Through the EMOP and within 72 hours, WFP was distributing food assistance to more than 105,000 people in shelters, hospitals and communities. Under the reconstruction plan launched by the Government, WFP shifted from in-kind assistance to cash-based transfers (CBTs), providing each household with the equivalent of USD 100 a month through the Government's safety net platform.
33. The CBTs for food assistance provided in Manabí and Esmeraldas represent the first time that WFP has used cash transfers for vulnerable households in an emergency response in Latin America. The Government appreciated this contribution, and both WFP and the Government are jointly monitoring the provision of assistance through CBTs, which gives affected people access to nutritious food and provides scope for improving their livelihoods.
34. WFP established three logistic centres in Pedernales, Manta and Quito. With 4,800 m<sup>2</sup> of storage and work space, these centres enabled the storage of more than 2,700 m<sup>3</sup> of humanitarian supplies for 13 organizations, including national and international Red Cross societies, the International Medical Corps, Action against Hunger, Save the Children, the Government of Ecuador and United Nations agencies. The emergency storage was open to all humanitarian actors free of charge. WFP also opened two temporary field offices in Pedernales and Manta and assigned a team to monitor operations at these offices. During the emergency response, WFP handed over SO activities, infrastructure and equipment to the Government to strengthen national stakeholders' capacity to respond to emergencies.

35. The Board team heard how an effective partnership between WFP and the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion was strengthening shock-responsive safety nets and improving emergency response tools and techniques. United Nations agencies, NGOs and national and local government institutions providing humanitarian assistance had effective partnerships and coordination mechanisms for emergency response. WFP led the logistics sector and co-led the food security sector with FAO.
36. The team was pleased to hear from beneficiaries that they were very satisfied with the role played by WFP staff following the earthquake in Pedernales and Manta. Team members expressed their appreciation of the humanitarian assistance provided by the WFP team in Ecuador in the earthquake response.

### Meeting with the United Nations Country Team

37. On 2 December, in Quito, the team had a meeting with the United Nations Resident Coordinator and representatives of United Nations organizations present in Ecuador: FAO, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), UNHCR, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization and UN-Women.
38. The **Resident Coordinator** stressed the great social progress achieved in Ecuador, with the poverty rate reduced by half in recent years. Ecuador had achieved most of the Millennium Development Goals, except for those related to maternal mortality and chronic child malnutrition. The Government had aligned its new National Development Plan to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. Under President Correa, the Government had re-established the leadership and functions of the State, but implementation of its major modernization programme had resulted in some curtailment of civil liberties. With elections scheduled for February 2017, political uncertainty was exacerbating the economic problems of decelerating economic growth and fear of recession. For the United Nations the big question was how to avoid losing what had been achieved so far. The earthquake of April 2016 had changed the Government's perspective on international cooperation. The Regional Coordinator expressed gratitude to all partners for their response to the earthquake. He observed that while Ecuador is not a "One UN" country, United Nations operations there reflected many aspects of "Delivering as One", although there was need to improve cooperation strategies. Regarding Ecuador's current situation, he drew attention to worrying signs over the last quarter, with the worsening state of the economy giving rise to concerns about negative impacts on poverty, child labour and inequalities affecting in particular indigenous people, women, children, and rural people.
39. The **UNHCR** representative explained the refugee situation in Ecuador and referred to the "graduation model" for the integration of refugees. The Government had taken over responsibility for determining refugee status, while UNHCR ensured adherence to humanitarian principles/international standards. With the looming economic crisis, refugee operations had to be reduced, in spite of continuing needs. Funding for refugees came from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), contingency funds and the private sector. The main problem was how to attract funding for a middle-income country such as Ecuador.
40. The **UNICEF** representative stated that there was a real risk of going backwards, with alarming levels of different forms of violence often linked to inequalities. Teen-age pregnancy was a common phenomenon. Progress had been made in increasing access to the education system, but drop-out rates were high and the quality of education problematic. Chronic malnutrition remained a problem and the prevalence of stunting in the country was 26 percent among children under the age of five, which is on the high end within the region. UNICEF was focusing on establishing effective collaboration with other United Nations agencies, and addressing the challenges in working with some ministries.
41. **UN-Women** focused on promoting the rights of women, tackling gender-based violence and examining issues related to women's unpaid domestic work, but faced scarce funding. Possible areas of cooperation with other agencies included "Gender and Climate Change" and "Gender and Nutrition".

42. The **UNDP** representative pointed out the weak role of the national Government in international cooperation, which was dealt with at the local level. UNDP provided technical assistance and capacity development at the local and national levels, with a focus on youth and women. UNDP considered that there was not much competition for funding among agencies.
43. **FAO** was represented by the UNICEF representative, who stressed the positive experience of joint programming, especially where WFP and FAO were partners in a programme. WFP and FAO co-led the food cluster. IFAD was not represented in Ecuador.
44. The representative of **UNFPA** stressed the need to harmonize development and humanitarian agendas.
45. The **IOM** representative mentioned IOM's project supporting the mobility of returnees at Ecuador's northern border.

#### **Meeting with the Government of Ecuador**

46. On 2 December 2016 in Quito, participants in the Board field visit held a final meeting with line ministries.
47. The **Coordinating Minister of Social Development**, Gabriela Rosero, summarized the ten years of achievement of the current Government, emphasizing its work after the April 2016 earthquake. She underscored the importance of technical cooperation, exchange of experiences and taking advantage of the respective value of each United Nations agency, noting that WFP played a fundamental role in this middle-income country. In combination with small local initiatives, WFP's assistance could become more sustainable. Maria Fernanda Franco, Adviser on International Cooperation, emphasized the importance of food and nutrition for children and praised WFP for its efforts in this area. She mentioned WFP's essential role in emergency logistics. Speaking about the multidimensional nature of poverty, she underlined the need to strengthen social protection programmes.
48. The **Minister of Economic and Social Inclusion**, Lidice Larrea, referred to WFP's food vouchers, which could be combined with vouchers covering other needs such as housing or rent vouchers. She stressed the scale of need for assistance in the country and stated that providing access to education and healthcare was a way of getting to the root causes of poverty.
49. From the **Ministry of External Relations and Human Mobility**, Vice Minister for Human Mobility, Esther Cuesta, and Director for United Nations Affairs, Patricio Troya, expressed their recognition of WFP's work.
50. The **Technical Secretary of Risk Management**, Evelyne Jaramillo, mentioned the importance of disaster preparedness, which should be proactive rather than reactive, and noted WFP's contribution to the work of the Government, and the importance and role of international cooperation in implementing the Sendai Framework for action and meeting the SDGs.
51. The **Ministry of Environment's** Deputy Secretary, Maria Victoria Chiriboga, spoke of the Climate Change and Food Security Project, financed from the Climate Adaptation Fund as a pilot in Ecuador, and explained its links to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Environment and local governments. She also stated the importance of incorporating gender considerations into programme management.
52. The **Minister of Public Health**, Margarita Guevara, thanked WFP for its excellent collaboration.
53. The **Ministry of Education's** Undersecretary of School Administration, Maribel Guerrero, noted the importance of WFP's school meals programme.

54. The **Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fisheries'** Director of Pre-investment for National and International Cooperation, Sharian Lopez, mentioned the Food Security and Nutrition Project in Imbabura.
55. From the **Technical Secretariat for International Cooperation**, Technical Secretary, Rubén Flores, mentioned WFP's work with the Government in line with the Government's strategy for international cooperation.
56. In general, government representatives praised WFP for its work in Ecuador and its spirit of collaboration.



## Acronyms Used in the Document

CBT	cash-based transfer
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CSP	country strategic plan
EMOP	emergency operation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FORECCSA	Enhancing Resilience of Communities to the Adverse Effects of Climate Change on Food Security
HIAS	formerly the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
RBAs	Rome-based agencies
SO	special operation
UNCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund