

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Dear members of the Executive Board,

When I arrived in Brazzaville less than a year ago, I was transitioning from several years of emergency work, and I wondered what it would be like to work in a country where the Government is not only our host and the direct recipient of our assistance, but also our biggest donor?

In **October 2008** the Government of Congo engaged to provide 60% financing for all WFP development interventions in the country, in addition to providing several offices and warehousing facilities. The Government has been our primary donor ever since. We are one of the few WFP Country Offices in the world that enjoys a virtual “core funding” which allows us to dedicate our full energy to assisting the Government to achieve its goals for its population. The result is before you: the draft Country Programme under consideration.

(THE PROCESS)

The Country Programme was developed through an analytical and a consultative process, in alignment with national development plans and the UNDAF. The process involved

- stock-taking through the Country Portfolio evaluation which was discussed here a year ago,
- the development of a Country Strategy Document
- and the carrying out a national CFSVA (Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment), all in 2013.
- There was also an expert-led project appraisal.
- Consultations with Government ministries, development partners and donors, UN agencies and civil society organizations were conducted to determine and later validate the activities under the Country Programme.

We can safely say that this document is not a WFP document but Congo’s plan for what it needs from us and how we can do it.

Add some facts here about ROC.

The Republic of Congo has a population of about 4.2 million and a new assessment has established that over 14% are affected by food insecurity-- about 618,000 people. It is a low middle-income country with socio economic indicators which are not as good. The 2014 Human Development Report ranked Congo 140th out of 187 countries. Notwithstanding improvements since

the 1990s, the proportion of the population living below the poverty line (of less than US\$ 1.25 per day) remains high, at 47.7 percent¹. The Global Hunger Index has also noted this worsening of the food security situation, in spite of the improving economic situation. The country is highly dependent on food imports for feeding its mostly urbanized population. The distribution of wealth in Congo is far from equitable and the Government is trying to address this through various means, including through a social protection policy developed a few years ago with technical assistance from UNICEF. WFP is playing a key support role to the Government in building up this social protection system, primarily through our support to school feeding, safety nets and nutrition. The country also hosts refugees from CAR and DRC, and we feed about 30,000 of them under a separate project.

(ACTIVITIES UNDER THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME)

The Country Programme supports the Government to provide

- school feeding,
- an innovative nutrition programme,
- expansion of a nutrition-sensitive safety net,
- and improving its emergency preparedness and response.

The CP will also provide considerable assistance to indigenous people (the poorest subgroup in the country) who constitute a significant percentage of beneficiaries in all components. The programme responds to the specific needs of women and girls, which make up 58% of the beneficiaries, and is gender sensitive throughout.

The activities align with WFP's corporate strategic plan. They are all in line with the Government's priorities as identified in the National Development Plan and respond to specific identified needs. Stakeholders have confirmed that WFP has a comparative advantage to assist the Government in these areas and I firmly believe that we as WFP can deliver excellent results.

(Partnerships)

With the government being the first and always-present partner, each of the CP's main components is embedded in a partnership framework:

¹ECOM, 2012

- Support to pregnant and lactating women will be carried out in coordination with UNFPA and UNICEF.
- Assistance to persons living with HIV and Tuberculosis will be closely coordinated with WHO, UNAIDS, and others active in the area.
- In addition to several other partners, the World Bank has recently entered into the field of safety nets in Congo, and promises to be a dynamic partner with complementary strengths to our own.
- We are working closely with UNICEF and WHO in education and in our school feeding programmes and we expect to work with a wide number of partners on the development and implementation of a national school feeding strategy. I am anticipating that the strategy will involve “home grown school feeding” and FAO has already helped us think through a model for technical support to ratchet up the capacity of local farmers to increase their production to respond to the needs of the school feeding programme. This is important in a country that imports most of its food, and it may contribute substantially to the Government’s objective of increasing agricultural production and diversifying the economy.

(Innovation)

Overall, the Country Programme introduces considerable innovation and seeks to build knowledge. This includes for example:

- Piloting an approach in one province for addressing chronic malnutrition through addressing crucial micronutrient deficiencies with pregnant and lactating women and children under two;
- Piloting the use of micronutrient powders in a small number of schools to determine whether school feeding can be a satisfactory delivery mechanism for addressing micronutrient deficiencies for school aged children;
- Assisting the Government with the building up and expansion of its safety nets programme. This assistance has already been successfully delivered during a pilot phase through a cash and voucher modality; providing support to local production and commerce as well as to the direct beneficiaries;
- and lastly, reinforcement of the Government’s systems for emergency preparedness and response.

(KEY CHALLENGES)

In provision of technical support to the Government, we have of course the excellent backup of our Regional Bureau and technical sections here in Rome. Other UN partners often have in-country expertise which we can rely on as well.

Funding remains a challenge. While the Government has committed to fund 60%, we are having difficulty finding the remaining 40% for development activities in this low Middle-Income Country. There are only a handful of donors which have contributed generously to WFP's development activities in Republic of Congo in recent years, but I am hopeful that the Government's own engagement will attract support from some additional donors.

Coming back to my original question: what it would be like to work in a country where the Government is not only our host and the recipient of our assistance, but also our biggest donor?

Well so far it has been a very interesting and rewarding task. We have been providing technical assistance and transferring know-how to Government partners, while helping establish the structures to implement excellent policies which the Government already has in place. With WFP support, the activities we introduce will be autonomously implemented by the Government in the future. By doing so we do not only respond to the immediate needs of poor and vulnerable Congolese but contribute to Congo transitioning to become a country without hunger, where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their full physical and cognitive growth. This Country Programme is a step forward in that direction.

I thank you for your attention, and I commend the Country Programme 200648 of the Republic of Congo for your approval.

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