



World Food Programme

**West Africa Regional Bureau
Presentation to Executive
Board
February 2011**

Dear Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

As I address you today, I am pleased to be able to tell you that, as a result of good rains, West Africa experienced an excellent 2010 cereal harvest; with an increase of 12% over the previous year and an increase of 35% in the Sahel region alone. In terms of levels of overall food production, we are facing a much better situation than that which I have had to report to you at recent sessions of the Executive Board.

Despite this good news, there remain some large pockets of food insecurity across the region and we find ourselves facing serious challenges including governance crises, malnutrition, the aftermath of floods and high food prices. The Regional Bureau places a high priority mitigating the effects of these challenges.

Several important Emergency Preparedness methods and tools that were efficiently piloted in 2010 will now be systematically introduced throughout the region. The Regional Bureau is increasing its capacity to effectively use the new tools that are now available under the Strategic Plan.

CRISIS IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

- As I speak of course, one of the key concerns of the Regional Bureau is the post-election crisis in Cote d'Ivoire. The potential for the crisis to cause instability and food insecurity throughout the region cannot be overstated. The country has already seen almost 40,000 internally displaced persons seeking shelter in the western region of the country.
- Food prices in Cote d'Ivoire continue to increase as quantities of food decrease. Normal commercial flows of goods and services has diminished production capacity and lowered household purchasing power. In addition, the influx of displaced populations has put pressure on certain local markets.
- Transportation prices have sky-rocketed over the last few weeks. The potential shortage of fuel in the country, the lack of cash in banks and an international embargo on the country will place additional challenges on WFP's ability to respond to the crisis in an effective and timely manner.
- The Côte d'Ivoire crisis is impacting heavily on Liberia; WFP is attempting to provide emergency assistance to more than 38,000 Ivorians who have been registered in the country's north east. As in Cote d'Ivoire, challenges remain due to slow registration of refugees and the poor state of the country's infrastructure. UNHCR predicts that this figure will likely rise to 100,000.

- WFP needs additional resources to serve the increasing number of refugees.

GOVERNANCE

- Moving away from the political stalemate in Cote d'Ivoire there are some real signs that the winds of positive change are blowing in other parts of the region. Successful elections have taken place in Niger and Guinea and we have witnessed an improved working environment. WFP is in continuous dialogue to reposition our assistance, within our mandate, in line with the evolving priorities of these governments.

EFFECTS OF HIGH PRICES

- Although the good harvest has brought relief for many people across the region, the negative effects of rising food prices are evident. The most import dependent countries of the region are most likely to be exposed to a shock, especially the “Western Basin” of net food importers whose markets are well integrated with international ones. This “Western Basin” includes Mauritania, Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau Sierra Leone and Liberia.
- It is predicted that food prices will peak internationally during the second quarter to record levels and that prices in West Africa will also rise in tandem, increasing the vulnerability of net buyer groups and increasing lean season assistance needs.
- WFP is exploring several preparatory measures, including the increased use of Forward Purchasing Facilities in order to buy coarse grain from the Sahel countries, strengthening monitoring systems and, as I mentioned, scaling up the use and breadth of cash programmes.

THE RIGHT FOOD AT THE RIGHT TIME

- Although the nutrition situation throughout the region appears to have improved since the Sahel crisis of this past year, both acute and chronic malnutrition rates remain unacceptably high and it is thus imperative that our response remain steady to prevent and mitigate further peaks in malnutrition in this fragile region.
- The Regional Bureau is updating its regional nutrition strategy: enhancing the capacity of the bureau nutrition unit and strengthening of nutritional activities at the country level. In line with the creation of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) framework, the bureau is looking to ensure that our nutrition activities throughout the region are evidence-based, brought to scale and focus on the critical 1000-day period when we can have the greatest impact on under nutrition among children.

The increased use of nutritious foods is being promoted as appropriate. I am pleased to advise that improved CSB production capacity issues are being resolved and we will have better access to this very useful product in 2011.

THE RIGHT TOOL AT THE RIGHT TIME

- Based on lessons learned from cash-for-work pilot projects and unconditional cash transfers to protect the Blanket Supplementary Feeding ration in 2010, the Niger Country Office is scaling up its cash activities in 2011 and 2012.
- In Burkina Faso, cash interventions are integrated into a new country programme. The use of cash and vouchers has proven to be an effective tool in protecting poor urban populations affected by the high food price crisis. The use of local shops for procurement and distribution represented an injection of cash into the local economy and guaranteed regular revenue for small shopkeepers located in poor urban areas.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RISK MANAGEMENT

- Regional Bureau support to country offices in the preparation of components under WFP's Strategic Objective 2 has greatly increased and the preparation of a Disaster Risk Reduction training package to reinforce WFP and key partners' capacity has been initiated. We are exploring ways to continue to responsibly implement operations in areas where terrorists are making access to vulnerable populations more risky.
- WFP has been very active in interagency processes and regional working groups such as those for Guinea + 6 and Cote d'Ivoire + 5. In view of a high risk election planned in April, the Nigeria +4 contingency planning process has just been initiated and pre-electoral simulation exercises have taken place in conjunction with the government and the UN Country Team.
- In addition, a Joint Action Plan for Emergency Preparedness and Response and Disaster Risk Reduction with the Regional Bureau in Johannesburg is allowing for the scale-up of programmes in a consistent and harmonised way.
- Support to governments and regional institutions have also been a priority with the implementation of the MOU with NEMA/Nigeria and the signature of a global MOU with ECOWAS and in reinforcing government capacities in Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Risk Reduction and Response.

CONCLUSION

My final point is to reiterate our commitment to work closely with government, partner organizations and communities in order to address the key issues and considerable challenges that I have highlighted to you here today.

We continue to request your support as we work towards lessening the negative impact of the region's challenges on its people and in particular as we look to alleviating the human, social and economic impact of the political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and the ripple effects being felt across the region.

CIV DEV Postponed.