



# Southern African Drought Emergencies

Personal Experiences of World Food Programme Alumni

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Joseph Kaifala, Editor

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**The World Food Programme Alumni Network**

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Book and cover design, Joseph Kaifala  
Front cover image: Cooking corn meal (Mozambique), WFP/Angela Van Rynbach

### **Dedication**

To those who devote their lives to humanitarian service with the World Food Programme; to the resilience, courage and determination of those in the places they serve; to the mothers and children who are recipients of their nutritious food, and to those affected by HIV/AIDS.



## Preface

One of the early suggestions made to the first Steering Committee of the World Food Programme (WFP) Alumni Network was to compile an oral history of WFP. The idea was that the personal experiences of staff members are not recorded anywhere, except by a few through their writings. The agency has a system for managing knowledge in the organization itself, but there has been no system to capture the valuable experiences of staff members. Therefore, the Steering Committee decided to find a way to capture the personal experiences and reflections of staff that can be shared with others, including former, current and prospective members of WFP.

The Steering Committee explored several options for the oral history project and decided to create a theme-based oral history. The themes could be by decades, by key events, by geographic area or according to other criteria. The discussion at the General Meeting of the Alumni Network in June 2016 led the Steering Committee to focus on one theme that had persisted over decades—droughts in Southern Africa. There are many other themes that deserve future consideration.

After deciding on the theme, the Steering Committee compiled the names of approximately 50 colleagues who had served in Southern Africa and had been engaged in some capacity in a Southern African drought. The Steering Committee wrote to those colleagues, describing the project, and sought their participation. About 35 alumni, including four former Executive Directors and a Deputy Executive Director, agreed to contribute their stories.

The Steering Committee decided to engage an external person to edit and compile the contributions of the alumni, under the guidance of an editorial panel. The panel consisted of Angela Van Rynbach and Gretchen Bloom in the US, Georgia Shaver in Europe, and Suresh Sharma in Asia. The former Executive Director, Catherine Bertini, helped the Steering Committee identify Joseph Kaifala, who was selected as the editor for the project.

Once the editor was identified, and the editorial panel was in place, the Steering Committee developed a simple template and requested the 35 alumni to respond. Each response was lightly edited, and in some cases, clarifications were sought. Two of the contributors preferred to be interviewed rather than complete the template. The editorial panel also decided to include the chapter “African Emergencies” from Jim Ingram’s book, *Bread and Stones: Leadership and the Struggle to Reform the United Nations World Food Programme* (2007), because of its relevance.

Here is the result. The stories are organized chronologically by decades. For obvious reasons, there are fewer accounts from the 1960s and 1970s, and more accounts from the 1980s, 1990s and this century. This is not a scholarly research or an official history; neither is it an official account of how effective or

efficient WFP's operations were during drought emergencies in Southern Africa. This is rather a collection of the reflections of some WFP alumni on their experiences.

The Steering Committee hopes that readers will find it interesting to learn from the experiences of WFP's alumni. There may be useful tips for current WFP colleagues engaged in operations now or reflections that provide food for thought amongst alumni. This oral history may also offer a constructive perspective for persons considering a career with WFP.

These are the stories of alumni. Therefore, thanks goes to the alumni who contributed to this first oral history project. The Steering Committee would also like to acknowledge the outstanding role of Joseph Kaifala in the production of this volume and to thank the editorial panel for their editorial advice.

Suresh R. Sharma  
President, WFP Alumni Network Steering Committee

## **Introduction**

When humanitarian emergencies occur, rarely do we see the men and women who work in the backrooms of office buildings or in the field, no matter how treacherous the terrain or region, to provide relief or solve problems. The stories of the men and women of the World Food Programme (WFP) who were involved in the Southern African droughts dating back to the 1960s bring us closer to the human efforts it takes to deal with complex humanitarian emergencies.

The Southern African droughts have presented some of the greatest challenges in the history of international humanitarian response. WFP responses over the years have called for the engagement of significant human and financial resources. In the two decades between 1960-1980, drought response in Southern Africa cost the organization more than USD 100 million. The response in the 1990s cost WFP approximately USD 598.2 million for that decade. The total cost of WFP drought response in the same region since the beginning of this millennium has been estimated at USD 919 million. These figures show the enormity of what it has taken, in financial terms, to save millions of lives during these recurring droughts.

However, the responses to these droughts have also presented many learning opportunities over the years, and WFP's international humanitarian response operations have become better. For instance, the Southern African droughts of the early 1990s were the first time WFP introduced many emergency response mechanisms we take for granted today. It was during the drought emergency of the early 1990s that WFP introduced Commodity Tracking through the Lotus 1-2-3 system. Most people would not understand what this means today because we can now track goods on whatever mode of transportation, wherever in the world, in real time.

While we sometimes hear about appeals for aid and see media coverage of WFP food distribution programs, we are not often exposed to the scale of infrastructural, administrative and diplomatic work it takes to reach those in need. In these contributions, the reader will learn about unconventional methods of demining in Mozambique in order to deliver food to remote places, early issues surrounding Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) foods, facilitating peace talks in Mozambique, dealing with HIV/AIDS without calling it what it is, navigating highly charged political atmospheres in many countries, and the creation of what David Morton describes as "unusual ports" in Southern Africa, etc.

There was also the issue of institutional independent decision-making rights, which WFP had to negotiate from other organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations. WFP was eventually reconstituted, allowing it to grow into one of the largest and most acclaimed international humanitarian organizations of our time. Its school



feeding, nutrition and food-for-work programs continue to sustain many vulnerable people around the world.

These improvements on WFP response to the Southern African droughts have occurred amidst different approaches to leadership and management by its Executive Directors. James Ingram presided over the reconstitution of WFP as an autonomous organization, Catherine Bertini decentralized the organization by delegating more authority to Country Directors and those in the field, James Morris used the organization's autonomy to institute interagency and public-private partnerships, and Josette Sheeran was particular about modernizing the organization and empowering local farmers to play pertinent roles in the fight against hunger. Some Country Directors have also offered details of their roles in the Southern African drought response during their tenure.

These oral history contributions do not only offer us stories of triumph when a solution was found and lives were saved, but also those pertaining to times of deep personal agony over unresolved issues or irreversible blunders. Many contributors still have vivid memories of those they left behind, wondering what became of them, and whether they made it in the end. These are some of the realities of humanitarian action in an emergency. One celebrates the good done, but lives with the question of what more could have been done to save others.

Many of these contributors were never in the limelight and may not have received public accolades for their services, but as you read these words, you will come to realize that they are the true heroes of humanitarian action. Their efforts in these emergencies saved lives, and we thank them for their services. We hope their experiences and stories will inspire the next generation of international humanitarian workers.

Joseph Kaifala  
Editor

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**1960-1970**



WFP Food Distribution (Lesotho), /WFP Stephen Wong

**John Murphy**  
WFP Adviser (1970-1974)  
WFP Project Officer (1967-1969)



**Requiring  
Multiple Hats  
In Humanitarian Service**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in July 1967. I served as a Ghana Government Counterpart Officer for the WFP Volta Lake Resettlement Project from 1964-1967, and WFP headquarters offered me a post as Project Officer in Botswana.

I was in Gaborone, Botswana (1967-1969) and Maseru, Lesotho (1970-1974) during the severe Southern Africa drought of 1966-1974. Both governments had well established Relief and Rehabilitation Units that coordinated all aspects of the drought emergency. Botswana's unit was staffed and financed by the UK Government. Lesotho's unit was

headed by a senior expatriate, a former Government District Officer. The US Peace Corps, the UK Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and International Volunteer Service (IVS) volunteers assisted drought programs in both countries.

My duties as a WFP Project Officer in Botswana were primarily devoted to emergency operations. In the case of Lesotho, I was responsible for both the emergency food-for-work project and the large scale school feeding and Mother and Child Health (MCH) development projects. The two countries were newly independent and low-income territories whose population was highly dependent on

agriculture, which was severely affected by the long drought. All sectors of the population were affected by the drought.

In both countries, Government Health Ministries and Community Development Departments were primarily responsible for identifying the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of their population during the initial part of the emergency. However, WFP later fielded evaluation and assessment missions to both countries.

In the case of Botswana, where WFP was the sole provider of emergency food assistance, there was no doubt whatsoever that WFP food assistance averted a major food deficit situation in the country. Regarding Lesotho, WFP projects operated in all districts of the country. Both Catholic Relief Service (CRS) and WFP food-for-work assistance in rural areas averted a major food problem for the very poor sectors of the population.

In both cases, I believe that the provision of WFP emergency food assistance prevented a catastrophic hunger situation. Most sectors of the population in both countries were also engaged in vital infrastructural food-for-work projects. Women were a major part of food-for-work teams in both countries due mainly to the fact that many men were away working in the mines of neighboring South Africa.

I was fortunate that both countries operated specialized food aid management units that avoided inter-ministerial conflicts, which

simplified my contacts with the relevant authorities. Other than the local Red Cross, Botswana had no NGOs operating in the country for the period 1967/1969. There was a large contingent of US Peace Corps Volunteers assisting the emergency operations. Lesotho, however, had the assistance of several NGOs, viz.: Save the Children (SCF), CARE, CRS, OXFAM, IVS and VSO, all of which enjoyed good relations with WFP and other UN entities, viz.: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Whilst in Botswana, I was still finding my feet on my first duty tour with WFP, and the most memorable food-for-work project was a dam building scheme supervised by a UK VSO Engineer in the northern area of the country, close to the main railway line. The quantity of water retained by the dam was such that the railway line operator, Rhodesian Railways, was allowed to draw water for its massive Garrard steam locomotives that operated on the line at that time.

When I first went on field trips in Lesotho's mountainous districts in 1970, on some occasions it was necessary to travel on horseback. As the food-for-work mountain road projects progressed over the period of the emergency, there was a remarkable improvement in the country's mountain infrastructure, which permitted the use of Land Rovers in the majority of districts. I

was very impressed by the UK's SCF implementation of a countrywide school-feeding program. One of its committee members at that time was Archbishop Desmond Tutu, then the Anglican Bishop of Maseru, who took a very active interest in the WFP assisted program.

The mainstays of Lesotho's MCH programs at the time were the many mission stations scattered over remote mountain areas. I always remember visiting one particularly remote clinic to enquire about the use of dried skimmed milk powder (DSM). The sister in charge stated that she did not know the whereabouts of any milk powder (a completely unknown commodity in remote areas), but stated that she had received some paper sacks of white powder, which she assumed was whitewash and used it to whitewash the clinic walls.

Although Botswana and Lesotho at the time were very poor, newly independent countries, my time and work were made easier by the fact that both countries had established food aid management units, which I thought was the norm for WFP assisted programs at the time. However, when I left the Southern African region in 1974, I soon realized that this was not the case, and I found working in countries where individual ministries were responsible for WFP assisted operations a harder task.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

There were very few organizational or structural changes during the period 1967-1974, for there were no computers or e-mails in those days, and one was at the mercy of the dreaded diplomatic pouch service and perhaps a teleprinter for communications with headquarters.

### **What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

I have now been retired for 27 years and when I visit headquarters today, I am amazed at the organizational and structural transformation that has taken place in WFP since my retirement in 1989. I was the first Chief of Logistics when the unit was established in 1984 with a staff of about seven internationals, which given the workload at the time, turned into a "mission impossible." The international community at that time was very slow to realize the importance of logistics and distribution management, unlike today when WFP is recognized as the lead UN agency in such matters, and has a huge staff that now operates under the newly established Supply Chain Management Division. The field staff had to be "all rounders" in my time and if I were to recommend anything to a person contemplating a career with WFP, it would be that he/she should be prepared to wear more than one hat and accept the fact that he/she might be called upon to perform duties alien to his/her academic background and previous experience.





**1980-1990**



Grain Distribution, /WFP Rein Skullerud

## James Ingram

Executive Director (1982-1992)

**Extract** (With author's permission): *Bread And Stones: Leadership and the Struggle to Reform the United Nations World Food Programme* (2007)



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### African Emergencies

From the time of my first appointment I had tried hard to stimulate WFP to a new level of creativity. The difference now was that I could speak out a little more freely and act a little more boldly. Reading through my diary from 1987 a continuing heavy burden was managing WFP's response to a new crisis in Africa. The great drought of 1983-4 had ended but the continent was beset by new food emergencies

set off by armed conflict in Mozambique, Angola, Sudan and Ethiopia, and by drought. That was not surprising. Over the preceding quarter-century, food production in sub-Saharan countries had not kept up with population growth, resulting in a 40 per cent shortfall by the mid-eighties. WFP's central role in an improved international emergency effort was now firmly established. We were responsible for massive internal logistical operations in Chad, Ethiopia and Sudan. Donor governments, NGOs and recipient governments were increasingly appreciative of the computerised information system (INTERFAIS) we had established to provide comprehensive information on food needs, food deliveries and pledges which became fully operational in 1987.

INTERFAIS arose out of the work of our Ethiopian taskforce whose ambit was later extended to encompass all affected African countries. Another by-product was the integration of the management of emergency operations with the management of development projects. That followed a comprehensive internal review of the secretariat by management

consultants, McKinsey and Co. At the time, WFP was the only UN system agency to take what was seen as a bold, even revolutionary, step of inviting in external reviewers and, moreover, to share their full report with the governing body.

Flowing from the McKinsey review I convened early in 1987 the first ever meeting that brought together staff from all of our country offices and headquarters. That it had never been done before reflected the "them and us" mentality which I hoped to overcome through the creation of the unified service.

I also continued to meet periodically with all our senior staff in each of the five geographical regions that were the basis of our operations, namely East and West Africa south of the Sahara, North Africa and the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. Travel to the countries we were assisting took up a lot of my time. I needed to see for myself how successful our operations were and build staff morale. A valuable part of these visits was to alert me to problems seen as serious by our field staff which headquarters had dealt with inadequately. Thus I visited West Africa for such a meeting in December 1984 and our missions in Senegal, the Gambia, Niger and Mali, including of course in the last named, Timbuktu. Much otherwise daunting upcountry travel had many compensations. I retain enormous respect and affection for the African people. In any one year I usually visited several countries in Africa. For example, in 1986/7 I went to

Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Ivory Coast and Morocco.

My personal role in Africa's crisis was limited to strategic direction and problem solving. The hands-on work was done by our dedicated staff in Rome and in all the affected countries. I use the word "dedicated" deliberately. I was humbled by the dedication and by the risks to their personal safety that our staff ran. Over the years a significant number lost their lives or were wounded, a trend which has increased through the nineties. Paradoxically, it is riskier to work for the UN as a civilian in emergencies sparked by conflict than as a soldier in a UN peacekeeping mission, though that is rarely acknowledged.

In October 1987 Eritreans fighting for independence from Ethiopia attacked one of our food convoys destroying 16 trucks and killing one driver. By this date WFP was managing a massive trucking operation on behalf of the donor community in Ethiopia. During 1987 we began a convoy system for the transport of food from Kenya into the southern Sudanese provinces, the theatre of the ongoing civil war. We expanded our coastal shipping service in Mozambique and mounted another complex logistical mission to reach refugees and drought victims in landlocked Malawi. Paradoxically in the light of today's desperate food situation in Zimbabwe, during the seventies and eighties that country was the source of much of our food aid. Indeed WFP was Zimbabwe's single biggest customer in many years of those decades.

Our logistical operations in Ethiopia and in Sudan gave rise to many difficult issues over the years between ourselves, donor governments and the governments of the countries whose peoples we were assisting, similar to those associated with the Darfur crisis of 2005. The difference is that today the concept and practice of humanitarian intervention by the international community has developed considerably since the end of the Cold War. Very often it was necessary for me to negotiate directly with the parties, including visits to the countries affected.

Recognition for WFP sometimes came in unusual ways. Thus, we were gratified when the World Bank gave us an untied grant of \$5 million to assist our logistical efforts. That was the first time the bank had done this with any UN agency.

In major complex emergencies many other UN agencies and NGOs become involved with the result that difficult issues of coordination arise. In the nineteen nineties special arrangements were necessary for each emergency. I have been given credit for joining with UNICEF's Executive Director, James Grant, to persuade the Secretary General in

1984 to bypass the usual bureaucratic processes and establish a special office in Ethiopia for emergency operations that would oversee and coordinate the work of the many organizations concerned with famine relief (Jansson 1987).

The success of that operation under the respected Kurt Jansson led to the establishment in New York of the Office for Emergency Operations in Africa (OEOA) to coordinate the UN system response to the whole African emergency. OEOA was headed by Bradford Morse, the Administrator of the UNDP, whose organization had been less than enthusiastic about the decision to appoint Jansson, arguing it was the function of the UNDP's country representatives to coordinate UN system operations. Although food aid was at the heart of the international response and was being coordinated, to everyone's satisfaction, by WFP through INTERFAIS, I made a point of giving unreserved support to OEOA, including by seconding an officer experienced in emergencies and by personally promoting the leadership efforts of Morse and his deputy, Maurice Strong. The OEOA was an advance on previous UN efforts to improve coordination.



## Georgia Shaver

Ombudsman, WFP Headquarters, Rome (2005-2011)  
Country Director and Representative, Ethiopia (2001-2005)  
Country Director and Regional Manager, Mozambique (1996-2001)  
Desk Officer and Senior Desk Officer, East and Southern Africa Bureau, WFP  
Headquarters, Rome (1987-1996)  
Project Officer, Zambia (1983-1987)  
Assistant Project Officer, Malawi (1980-1983)



*Georgia Shaver, WFP/Rein Skullerud*

### **Possibilities As Opportunities**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1980 as an Assistant Project Officer assigned to Lilongwe, Malawi. I had been an intern at the International Labor Organization (ILO) in the WFP/ILO Liaison Office, and my boss, Dott. Nook, made a phone call to WFP, Rome, and encouraged them to consider a young American girl for employment.

During the Southern African drought (1984/1985), I was in Lusaka,

Zambia, where I was stationed from 1983-1987. The drought affected us in Zambia. We airlifted maize and beans to affected areas. Food assistance during a drought is always very valuable. I don't recall any heavy lifting that had to be done to address this drought, unlike what I later experienced with the Ethiopian drought. However, a highlight that I recall was our office being tasked to help organize a major donor pledging conference in the spring of 1985 (I



believe). Now, this was a new experience for me and it opened my eyes to other important aspects of humanitarian response—i.e. fundraising and communications.

I helped organize a donor pledging conference in coordination with the UN Office for Emergency Operations in Africa. One has to remember that WFP was located in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office at the time and the WFP Representative was the UNDP Representative, so we were working with and on behalf of the UNDP Representative. The UN worked closely with the agencies on the ground.

I was given a lot of responsibility, considering my experience. But then again, offices were small in those days and I was lucky to be exposed to a variety of work, and therefore gained valuable experiences that strengthened my skills and contributed to my WFP career.

The working relationship was very close and supportive, thanks to the critical role played by the Senior Advisor of the Executive Director, the former Foreign Minister of Ethiopia, Mr. Ketema Yifru. His past experience and connections allowed WFP to open doors at the highest levels of government, ensuring total collaboration. This was my second WFP assignment and Ketema Yifru, a very kind and humble gentleman, showed me “the ropes” on accessing the right people and obtaining a buy-in for organizing the donor conference.

The donor conference was a success, and it taught me a lot about logistics, administration and organization. Furthermore, it gave me an insight into another aspect of the UN—the political side—as well as how to prepare documentation to highlight needs, requirements, and sensitize the international donor community. Compared to many other conferences I would attend later in my career, this was rather “small town,” but it was effective. My two-person office exposed me to new and challenging events.

Our donor conference preceded the Live Aid event held during the summer of 1985. Having been involved in raising funds and awareness, I felt so much more engaged and attached to that event. A real connection was made even if I attended the event only via my television screen.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

I worked with WFP for 31 years—both in the field and at headquarters. I witnessed and participated in major transformations at the organization. I started when WFP was quite small in comparison to today. Therefore, I was given opportunities to learn and to carry out many aspects of the work such as design, finance, administration, logistics, diplomacy, evaluation, fundraising, etc. I was also involved in other big emergencies as well as the design and implementation of development-oriented activities. I served half of my career in the field and the other half at headquarters, from where I

traveled extensively. I had fantastic mentors and never felt any gender impediments. I also served on staff associations to better understand the concerns and constraints that staff faced in their jobs and careers. All possibilities were opportunities—at least from my perspective.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

I would advise any young man or woman thinking of a career or

starting a position at WFP to go to the field—do not stay at headquarters. Do a variety of jobs, from the most menial to the more strategic. Emergencies are teachers and great opportunities to bond with colleagues. Learn and apply the tools of problem solving and programming as well as negotiation.



**1990-2000**



*Ricardo Valesquez and Catherine Bertini (Mozambique), /WFP Tom Haskell*

**Arnt Breivik**  
Logistics Officer



*Arnt Breivik and Catherine Bertini, WFP/Tom Haskell*

### **A View From the Operation Room In Johannesburg**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1989 in Mozambique as a Senior Logistics Officer. During the El Niño effect and crop failure, I was based in Maputo, Mozambique, and then transferred to Johannesburg, South Africa.

WFP had major refugee programs in Malawi and lesser ones in Zimbabwe, Swaziland and Zambia. Large volumes of food were brought to Mozambique and WFP was responsible for coastal transport to a large number of ports for relief programs and commercial commodities. For the Malawi and Zimbabwe programs, most cereals were procured from the Zimbabwean Marketing Board prior to the effect of the drought. For the Mozambique programs, food was received mainly

from the USA, and from the ports they were distributed by the national relief agency with support from CARE. For Swaziland and Lesotho, cereals were procured in South Africa.

Beginning in 1992, the situation was that South Africa was short of cereal harvest due to the drought, and so was Zimbabwe. While South Africa had some stock, the Zimbabwean Marketing Board had sold out its stocks and was running completely empty during the spring of 1992, thus it was unable to support the market and relief operations of Malawi, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and the Mozambican refugee programs in Malawi. The emptying of stocks in Zimbabwe had not been communicated and silos were

completely empty by the first train arrival in Harare. All this meant that instead of domestic and shorter over-land hauls, cereals had to come by ports and then moved by trucks and trains.

I was lucky, having been in Mozambique and established contacts with major transporters. I was also in South Africa and Zimbabwe. A notice in a South African paper described the effect of El Niño, which was communicated to WFP in Rome. Thereafter, Moz (Country Director) and I were invited to a "logistic/ awareness" meeting in Harare, which the Regional Manager of USAID had called for, with the participation of all USAID managers in the region. Thereafter, Tun Myat and Andrew Toh came to Harare to meet with the USAID Regional Manager, as we all feared the consequences of the drought. This was maybe one of the most important meetings during the period. Still only at transport and logistics level, WFP was asked to coordinate all transports in the region related to cereal movements for what was foreseen as a possible disaster if not correctly handled. The second option was for USAID to contract a commercial company, which could have been problematic. The likely scenario was agreed, and a plan including a logistics unit in South Africa and a regional office in Harare was quickly drawn.

It was agreed that the different relief and development programs of WFP should not be directly engaged in the project, nor should NGO operations. They had programs and were to be

supplied as before, just by other routes. There and then it was decided that I should be based in South Africa, and I was happy that the project was a purely transport and logistics one.

Afterward, we went to Johannesburg and met with the South African Rail and Port Authorities, where we were very well received. They had been contacted and were keen on giving us all the support. They welcomed and offered to host a coordination center with participants from the rail authorities of Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique, and Malawi as needed, under a WFP arrangement. The South African ports and cereal boards would also be invited.

The WFP Regional Office simultaneously worked fast and set up a Regional Center to work and coordinate with the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which on a ministerial level soon got to work to facilitate border crossings, customs, road regulations, load limits on bridges and roads, and general political issues that would also facilitate transport activities. As transport by rail would be crucial, USAID created a project to support with spare parts and repair of rail equipment, and to facilitate transfer of trains from one type of rail size to another (Tazara/ZIM).

WFP was given its own office and project desks for managers from the railways of Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana in an operation room set up at Spoornet (railways) in Johannesburg with additional representation of the ports and

maize board, as well as space for visiting representatives from Mozambique and Malawi.

South Africa was under embargo at the time and the presence of WFP as a UN agency was much appreciated by both South Africa and SADC countries. They made ministerial level visits and I was included in meetings with their representatives in the unit.

Because of the changed transport patterns, with a larger dependency on South African ports for all destinations and less on Mozambique, it was important to look at the South African rail and connection at borders. For arrivals at South African ports, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and other commercial actors were receiving grains in bulk in open wagons for storage in silos at destinations. WFP would bag at the ports and transport to warehouses, mostly in transit in Harare for forwarding to Malawi. WFP headquarters had wisely contracted the best firms in the region: two major trucking companies and the superior agent and overland operator, with a back-to-back deal from FO (Fee Out) vessels, which took off the burden of demurrage claims from FIO (Fee In and Out) for WFP.

As South Africa had been a net exporter of cereal, the port silos had to be reversed from export to import modus with necessary adjustments to the systems. Also, they allowed WFP to use closed fruit wagons that were taken from dessert storage and where bagging could be done directly

from bulk and into the wagons. These moves were essential. In particular, the use of closed wagons gave WFP a priority at the borders due to off-take capacity at silos. Bank accounts were arranged by headquarters and the office started to function well.

A US shipping company had been contacted by USAID to help Spoornet set up a computerized tracking system for rail wagon moves. This was called back due to the embargo and disagreeing shareholders. In a shorter period, WFP managed wagon tracking for the unit until a transit from manual to data tracking was developed by the operation room.

I manned the WFP office with a very skilful local lady hired through a managing firm, and for a while, a Port Captain on a three month Temporary Duty Assignment. Until late 1992, WFP had no official agreement with South Africa. As I was traveling a lot to all ports, as well as Harare and Blantyre, from Namibia in the west to Dar es Salaam, for meetings and some problem solving, my presence became an issue with immigration officers at the Johannesburg airport (I was a Norwegian traveling on a UN passport and going often to Mozambique). I discussed the matter with my contact in the Foreign Affairs Office and shortly after the government issued a letter of access through all border posts, then a unilateral agreement in late 1992. This meant that the office was official, privileges were granted, and I was officially transferred to Johannesburg. This also allowed WFP



to officially man the office, and a budget was approved for seven staff. However, we continued with only two of us, since things had become routine and the next crop harvest looked promising.

There were limited roles for women other than a very capable lady in our Johannesburg office and Nicole Menage, who gave good support from the Regional Office in Harare. Women did not have great representation within logistics and transport in those days.

The situation was rare. South Africa was under embargo and SADC was supposed to implement the embargo. The Regional Office in Harare must have done a great job of selling the idea of how to get together and work from a ministerial level and down, both within SADC and cooperation with WFP and South African partners. South Africa seemed to appreciate the cooperation, particularly facilitating the operation room in Johannesburg. We had frequent planning meetings in Johannesburg where the operation room, transporters and WFP worked in harmony. Since the embargo was still in force, we did not make much publicity of the situation.

The office in South Africa did not work with NGOs, except for meeting a few times with South African relief groups to share information. They were efficient and great, and managed their enormous programs very well.

My most memorable experiences are the very professional and quick

decision-making practices at headquarters, represented by Tun, Andrew, the shipping and logistics staff, and the support given to our Johannesburg operation. Also, the set up in Harare by David Morton, Nicole and their staff, later strengthened by the EU-supported Corsino and Sibanda, and how they managed to work so well together and with SADC authorities.

It was also admirable how fast WFP was able to strengthen the whole logistics set up in the region, particularly in Mozambique where Mr. Clark got his dream team in place. Our partners in South Africa were just great, including those from Zimbabwe, Zambia and Botswana. Also, WFP and others at ports and inland made efforts that allowed the El Niño drought operation 1992/1993 to be an operation without much hiccups and negative attentions. It was an operation where all parties, particularly the transporters, rail and ports, made huge efforts to facilitate each other and to work toward a common goal, making each and all look great.

Taking into consideration the isolation and embargo on South Africa during 1992/1993, so many things were different from other relief and commercial operations. It was great to be with colleagues from South Africa and to see our WFP culture blended in. It was also great to see how well WFP and our colleagues from Africa were received as part of the operation room and how our views were respected and implemented professionally.

It was rare to see the goodwill received from the government and their issuing of free passes for border posts and later the unilateral agreement. It was strange to learn about issues in Mozambique from visitors, having been a very mobile guest there for six years.

It was also interesting to be contacted and to be able to have a high level group facilitate the opening of a new road access for transport. It was great to see the perception of the authorities toward the unit in Johannesburg and the loyalty to calculations for choice of ports made based on demurrage costs, time on loading, considerations for other commodities (fertilizers were given high priority in Beira for Malawi and Zimbabwe), expected time in different ports, and a few other elements. Waiting time in Durban could be 10-15 days, while in Beira it was up to more than 30 days, and these were compared to several other ports and costs of overland transport and waiting time. Demurrage charges varied from about USD 10,000 to USD 22,000 per day (if my memory is somewhat correct). It was also great to see other facilitations such as interchanges, time at borders, and the easing of documentation flow.

#### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

WFP was for me an organization with mainly good experiences. I had the opportunity to be a player in many large operations with support from

colleagues both at headquarters and in the field. As a "field" person, I was not too encouraged by my short spell at headquarters. Spending time in meetings and producing papers people in the field did not always have time to absorb, I felt, was not the best way of using my time. I also felt most colleagues were at a high professional level. But in the field, there was a sense of working together for the best of WFP, the beneficiaries, the team and cooperating organizations and authorities. Generally, I had a feeling of being on an A-team with WFP.

#### **What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

First, it would be important to show enthusiasm and willingness to learn from both higher and lower ranked people. Also, one needs to be able to learn from all levels of people in the countries where one serves. Make sure they have some good knowledge of at least one area they are to work within, preferably with some practical experience. It should be less important if they have a PhD, a Masters or practical studies. Education seems in some cases to be just a tool to get a foot inside the organization, while job learning comes from colleagues and the willingness to understand the environment. Honesty is important. With such large values involved, anyone thinking of a career with WFP should be advised never to even attempt to think of enriching him/herself or buying privileges.



## Bronek Szynalski

Chief, Disaster Relief Service/Director, Emergency Division (1986-1994)



*Food Delivery, WFP/Wilson Gama*

### **A Genuine Motivation to Help Others**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) on April 1, 1969 in response to an advertisement in an international paper. I was based in Rome, Italy, during the Southern African drought. The Southern African drought (1992) was a major emergency and an appropriate response was required. From memory, the total budget WFP had at its disposal, all accounts done at the end, was some USD 2.8 billion.

As Director of the Emergency Division or Emergency Relief Service, I was responsible for the response at headquarters and decisions on the ground—a key decision being the establishment of a coordinating unit in Harare, Zimbabwe.

There were massive needs resulting from crop failure in most countries of the Southern Africa area, with the

exception of South Africa and Zimbabwe. Some of the assessment tools used to identify needs were food aid assessment missions and geographical risk mapping. The Southern African response was one of the most successful WFP responses to an emergency.

Food assistance was indispensable during the emergency. The local communities were very cooperative. Women were mainly involved in distribution. Through a coordinating mechanism, collaboration with governments was excellent, especially with the two countries that had no major drought, but provided transport, logistics, and in the case of Zimbabwe, grain from its stocks. The UN entities and NGOs involved also coordinated and worked well together.

My most memorable experiences during the emergency include the efficiency of the coordinating mechanism, the information system, the superb transport and logistics arrangements with the South African Railways, and to some extent generous funding, including a contribution from the World Bank—unprecedented up to then in WFP history. Moreover, finding a colleague who dabbled in geographical mapping by hand, which led to the development of risk mapping, now an essential tool for WFP. I brought him to Rome and he proved a most valuable asset for WFP’s relief work in later years.

**What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

WFP is a fantastic organization with inevitable shortcomings, but one that knew how to adapt and change. Separation from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) was key to the speed of emergency response, with WFP setting a deadline of three days for the FAO Director General to clear a submission. The realization that transport and logistics were key to

the efficiency of response and the saving of lives was an important step. Additionally, realizing during the Africa Food Crisis (1983/1985) that assessing food needs and delivery based on country capacity to receive and distribute was a major defect in the system. As a result, WFP needed to create the capacity to reach people and prevent them from traveling incredible distances and risking their lives to seek assistance. In 1994, a decision was reached to delegate to the field and undertake other subsequent reorganization with regional structures—an empowerment of field staff.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

My recommendation to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP is to be sure that you are genuinely motivated to help people. Humanitarian work requires sacrifice and dedication unparalleled in private or civil service employment. These days, most WFP field offices are in non-family duty stations and this must be taken into account if one wants to consider WFP as an employer.

## Rick Corsino

Rep/Country Director (2000-2008)



### **A Complex Organization With a Sophisticated Approach**

When I participated in the 1992/1993 drought response, I was not yet working for the World Food Programme (WFP). My participation was as a Southern African Development Community Technical Unit (SADC-TU) Technical Assistance Consultant assigned to the joint SADC/WFP coordination office in Harare. It was through this experience that I was first exposed to WFP. I had never heard of WFP before this period.

Immediately following the drought response, I joined the WFP Logistics Division in Rome (1993) on an initial five-month consultant contract. I retired from WFP fifteen years later.

I was based in Harare during the 1992/1993 drought. I also participated in the earliest stages of the 2015 response. I participated in an initial logistics assessment in February/March 2016, working out of the WFP Regional Office in Johannesburg.

I was with the Southern Africa Transport and Communications Commission (SATCC) Technical Unit in Maputo when the drought (1992/1993) response commenced. Unfortunately, SADC/SATCC as an institution was neither equipped nor proactive to take a genuine leading role in coordinating relief efforts. There was also the prevailing political conflict in the region—between the frontline states (SADC) and South Africa.

Since most of the major ports serving the region are in South Africa, it was imperative to make the most of that country's relatively developed transport infrastructure. However, the international relief effort suffered because South Africa was also transitioning from apartheid. WFP lobbying and taking the risk of helping to staff a Logistics Operation unit in South Africa was a bold move at the time, and one that proved critical to the ultimate success of the effort.

During the drought (1992/1993), I served in the jointly staffed SADC/WFP Regional Logistics Advisory Centre (RLAC) in Harare. It was hosted by the SADC Food Security arm, which was based in Zimbabwe. Together with other SADC and WFP staff, I helped assemble data related to food needs in the region, confirmed and sought contributions, food purchases, shipments, arrival ports, mode of transport (road/rail) and scheduling to destination countries. We then analysed, consolidated, and disseminated this information for the use of impacted governments,

donors and operational agencies. For the 2015 drought, I conducted the initial logistics capacity assessment for the main Southern African ports/corridors on behalf of the Regional Bureau in Johannesburg (RBJ).

From the big picture, that is, looking at food deficits for Southern Africa over a 12 to 18 month period during the 1992/1993 drought, food assistance was critical, and in at least a few cases, life-saving. Approximately 12 million mt of food arrived for distribution in the affected region and WFP was one of the main players in the effort.

One of the things I noted between my involvement in the early 1990s and in 2016 is the continued inability of SADC to step up to its responsibilities for regional coordination. In the early 1990s, it was still preoccupied with other important issues, namely South Africa, and simply did not have the leadership, resources, and skills to step up to a major coordination task like drought response. Unfortunately, nearly 25 years later, the organisation still relies on outsiders such as WFP to do much of the heavy lifting while SADC continues to seek credit when things go well.

From a logistics point of view, there was not so much interaction between the UN and NGOs. While not a UN employee at the time, it was my first time working with a UN agency. Prior to that, I believed that the UN was generally a useless organisation, spending more time meeting, talking and preparing meaningless reports,

instead of doing anything constructive. Fortunately for me, my first experience was with WFP—an organization I found to be a genuinely “can do” operational agency. This changed my entire outlook toward the UN.

**What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

WFP has become a much more complex organisation with a sophisticated approach to its mandate. This is in large part a response to the demands of its clients, though abetted by cost effective technical advances in communications, data collection and data manipulation. It has also

become a “heavy” organisation, the sort that, back in the early 1990s, staff would deride as being out of touch.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

It is essential to get solid experience outside the UN/NGO system before joining WFP. Ideally, this should be in a business environment rather than in international emergency response or development. Once at WFP, experience in both the field and at headquarters is important to have an accurate understanding of how WFP works, as well as its strengths and weaknesses.





## David Morton

Area Director, Southern Africa (1990-1992)



*David Morton and Catherine Bertini, WFP/Tom Haskell*

### Transporting Aid By Unusual Ports

When I arrived in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1990, Area Director was a new concept at the World Food Programme (WFP). The position was in title only—there were no funds to go with it, apart from salary and travel budget—and WFP Deputy Representatives (still the official title of Country Directors in those days, I believe) resented the additional layer of management.

The Harare office was set up to procure Zimbabwe's maize surpluses and transport them to various WFP projects in Africa. When I arrived in 1990, it was staffed by one International Procurement Officer and two local Administrative

Assistants. There were no WFP projects in Zimbabwe. Coming from drought-stricken Ethiopia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) representative assured me that Zimbabwe had never been struck by drought. Having served in Lesotho (1969-1976) and Malawi, I was quite familiar with Southern Africa and also with drought emergencies from tours in Lesotho (1969-1976) and Ethiopia (1986-1990).

As Area Director, I traveled frequently to countries in the region and I detected the early warning signs of the failing main season rains. By reading local newspapers

and regular phone calls to WFP Country Directors, I had a very broad overview when the main rains of the southern hemisphere growing season started failing over the September 1991–March 1992 growing season. All countries were affected. Most WFP country offices in those days actually completed the monthly Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Early Warning Forecasts, which helped us with a regional overview and also provided crop shortage statistics.

My reports of the impending problems were largely dismissed by WFP headquarters, because whilst there had been regular droughts affecting individual countries in the region, there had never been a recorded crop failure that affected all countries in the region, including the big maize surplus-producing countries of South Africa and Zimbabwe. In fact, I was told that I would be transferred to Pakistan that summer—this move was later cancelled.

It was soon clear to me that there were not going to be any surpluses and there was talk of countries in the region banning cereal export. This had major implications for potential drought relief measures, because instead of local purchase, the food would have to be imported using the limited capacity of the region's ports and railways. Aid would have had to be expedited to arrive in time for the peak hunger period, expected to be in the later part of the year, before the next harvest in the spring of 1993.

I had always kept regular contact and shared information with the Harare based USAID Regional Representative, David Morse, and also at least two of the international NGO representatives whom I had worked with during my time as Director of the Thai-Cambodia United Nations Border Relief Operation (UNBRO) in the 1980s. The NGOs were able to provide local information about the problems farmers faced with the drought.

It was not until WFP headquarters received a report from David Morse that my warnings were taken seriously. In short order, food assessments were undertaken in early 1992 in all Southern African countries, except South Africa. I undertook the assessments in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and I believe, Namibia. I drew up a drought relief project for Zimbabwe, which had never received food aid before. The Zimbabwe Government established a useful coordination mechanism, bringing together government offices, UN agencies and NGOs. I had to assist Tony Mornement in Zambia to draw up a drought relief project, because he was ill at the time. A logistics mission for the region was mounted, looking mainly at the capacity of ports and railways. WFP set up a logistics coordination and support office in Harare, for which I found new premises. The office was staffed by a Logistics Officer (Rick Corsino) and an Information Officer. Although South Africa was still under apartheid, special dispensation was received from the UN in New York for WFP to establish an office within the

South African Railways (Spoornet) offices in Johannesburg, to be manned by an International Logistics Officer, Arnt Breivik.

The Harare office was strengthened by the appointment of a second international officer, Nicole Menage, whose principal role was to look after the Zimbabwe drought relief project, so that I could focus on regional food and logistics issues. A Media Officer, Mercedes Sayagues, was also posted to Harare to cover the region.

In June, Jan Eliason, Head of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), designated me as the UN Regional Coordinator for Food and Logistics for Southern Africa. David Morse of USAID provided WFP-Harare with a USD 10 million fund to strengthen logistics for the emergency. This was used for diverse purposes, from hiring South African railway locomotives for Mozambican railways and refurbishing rail freight cars to the procurement of stacking equipment for bagged maize in Zambia.

The logistics assessments had identified very early on that the ports and railways were going to be principal bottlenecks. In addition to handling a massive amount of bilateral and multilateral food aid, they would have to cope with South Africa and Zimbabwe's commercial maize imports, whereas previously both countries had been self-sufficient. There was going to be an increase in imports of fertilizer as well. The strategy was to spread imports over as many ports and land routes as possible to reduce

congestion. Thus "unusual" ports such as Walvis Bay, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London were used for aid. To relieve the railways, road freight was used where appropriate. Effort was also made to upgrade Mozambique's ports and railways.

I had brought a copy of the dBase III database program that we used in Ethiopia to produce a weekly Shipping Bulletin, a coordination tool for the Ethiopian droughts. I modified the program for Southern Africa by incorporating all ports in the region, from Walvis Bay to Dar-es-Salaam. With appropriate inputs of shipping arrival data, the program provided a week-by-week pipeline forecast of expected shipment arrivals, sorted by port. WFP headquarters and country offices provided data on WFP shipments. Bilateral data was obtained weekly from various donors, the most important one being the European Union (EU). Commercial food imports were obtained from governments. Arnt Breivik in Johannesburg obtained details of all South African bulk imports from Spoornet. The pipeline forecast tool also incorporated all non-food shipments: cement, fertilizer, etc., since these congested the ports as well. The tool clearly indicated which ports would be congested and when. It allowed aid and commercial operators to plan their imports to avoid choke points and times. This was before the Internet, so the information had to go out in a weekly fax to all ports, railway authorities, Ministries of Transport, donors, and Government Drought Coordination offices. This

started, I believe, around April 1992. Although some ports and railways experienced quite severe congestions, aid materials generally got through.

In November 1992, I was transferred from Harare to Former Yugoslavia to start a new WFP program covering all the republics of the Former Yugoslavia, which had broken up earlier that year and was in a virtual state of war. In close cooperation with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), food aid was provided to refugees and other displaced persons in the republics. In 1993, this operation was the largest WFP project.

In 1995, I was transferred to Rome under Bronek Szynalski as Chief of Emergency Operational Policy. In 1996, I was made Chief of Logistics,

serving under Tun Myat. Apart from providing logistics support to the new Regional Bureau and country offices, this was a period of devolving logistics capacity and decision-making from headquarters to the field.

In 1998, I was transferred to Pyongyang, DPRK, as WFP Representative and UN Humanitarian Coordinator. In 1999, the operation in DPRK became WFP's largest project. That same year, I was appointed, additionally, as UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative for the DPRK.

In 2002, I transferred to Rome to replace Ramiro Lopes da Silva as Director of Transport, where I remained until my early retirement in 2005.

**Michele Mercaldo**  
Shipping Officer (1994-2001)



### **Do Not Touch What Works**

After high school, I did military service with the Italian Naval Academy and Service as midshipman (1959-1961). Thereafter, I went to sail on merchant navy ships, where I rose to the rank of Master Mariner. In 1970, I joined a ship broking firm that happened to belong to a panel of shipbrokers assisting the World Food Programme (WFP) with the chartering of tonnage. In 1990, the firm closed activity, so I worked as a ship agent, while at the same time spending periods with WFP as a consultant. In 1994, I joined WFP as Shipping Officer. I retired in 2001, but I was recalled by WFP for the Iraq emergencies (2003-2004) and all other subsequent emergencies. I also share my experiences by teaching WFP staff members. Presently, and for the fourth consecutive year, I am working as a

shipping consultant, particularly following all the Level Three emergencies. It is already planned that I shall continue in 2017.

During the Southern African drought emergencies, I provided chartering and operation for transport. I also assisted with commodity tracking. These services were quite essential to assisting those in the field and meeting the needs of beneficiaries. I recall the first chartering of landing crafts to deliver food to refugees on the beaches along the coast of Mozambique in the emergency of the early 1980s. That was the first time WFP used landing crafts, as far as I recall as a WFP shipbroker since 1970. During the Southern African emergency of the early 1990s, I recall a feat performed by the WFP shipping unit. It was August and there were only three active

personnel in the chartering unit: Dierk Stegen, the Assistant Carina Nilsson, and me. In a single day, Dierk chartered seven large bulk-carriers and the three of us realized that in one day we were controlling 63 bulk/break-bulk ships employed by WFP. (Today WFP charters about 120 bulk/break-bulk ships per year).

The second issue is also related to the emergency of the early 1990s. At that time, there was no decentralization at WFP. The staff at headquarters did the local overland contracting. Amir Abdulla, the Logistics Officer at the time, did programming for the discharge and overland transport of commodities. He needed to be well-informed about the progress of each shipment. Therefore, I started the first ever commodity tracking on a spreadsheet (at the time with the Lotus 1-2-3 system—Excel was still unknown). The Southern African emergency gave birth to the commodity tracking now widely used by WFP.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

I could write a book about my time and work with WFP, but I will limit myself to an old Latin phrase: *quieta non movere*, don't touch what works. Any reader would understand the phrase by noting that the writer is 79 years old.

### **What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

My recommendation to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP would be to learn grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. Additionally, to acquire skills in arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music, which have been substituted by the Internet in modern societies. Talk, instead of writing, whenever possible and suitable. Try always to put yourself in the position of the receiving party and be ready to say what he/she needs to know (It is implicit that all staff should know very well what other staff are about).

## Peter L. Simkin

UN Regional Coordinator, Ethiopia (1995-96)  
UN Humanitarian Coordinator /Director of the Unit for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UCAH), Angola (1992-1995)  
UN Resident Coordinator/UNDP Resident Representative/WFP Representative, Mozambique (1990-1992)  
WFP Area Director Southern Africa, Harare (1987-1990)  
WFP Chief of Staffing and Training Branch, Rome (1981-1986)  
WFP Senior Adviser in Bolivia (1979-1980); Senior Adviser in Ethiopia (1975-79)  
WFP Senior Adviser in Malawi and Zambia (1972-74)  
WFP Adviser in Swaziland (1971-1972)



### Weaning WFP from FAO

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1971 from the Government of Swaziland where I was responsible for, amongst other government duties, drought relief.

There were no major droughts in Southern Africa between 1971-1974,

so WFP was mainly concerned with development activities such as school feeding and food-for-work. I went to Ethiopia in 1975 and managed major droughts and emergencies until 1978. I negotiated donor funding and helped set up a UN Emergency Transportation Unit with over 70 trucks and trailers.

As WFP Area Director for Southern Africa, overseeing seven WFP country offices between 1987-1990, I managed huge grain purchases and regional logistics from the Grain Marketing Board in Zimbabwe to meet the needs of drought affected areas and Mozambican refugees throughout Southern Africa.

One of my main roles as UN Coordinator for Special Relief Operations in Mozambique from 1990-1992 was the coordination of all relief programs during the civil war and regional droughts from 1991-1992. I was also involved in negotiations between the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) Government and the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) rebels for humanitarian access. In Angola, I was in charge of setting up 15 Quartering Areas for



the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA) soldiers/rebels and their families. WFP had a central role in managing regional famine relief, local purchases and logistics operations.

I was head of WFP offices in Swaziland, Malawi and Zambia, Area Director for Southern Africa in the late 1980s, and UN Resident Coordinator in Mozambique during the 1990 famine. In the 2000s, I led evaluation missions to assess international response to the Mozambique floods and Ethiopian emergencies. We provided food, seed, medicine, and replaced rural assets. We also conducted field visits to all affected areas.

Where there was access to humanitarian assistance, death from famine was minimal. Where conflict prevented access, starvation and infant mortality were widespread. Food assistance was very essential during the emergency. Our main problems were targeting food assistance to the most vulnerable people and phasing out free food with food-for-work projects. We also faced difficulties deciding who were the most vulnerable people and organizing food-for-work activities.

WFP insisted on the full participation of women in all discussions and decisions. Every government established a Specialized Emergency Response unit as a UN counterpart agency. WFP's role was to support these agencies at every stage in the management of drought relief and needs assessment. It varied from country to country, but usually

government emergency units are responsible for inter-agency coordination, with direct support from UN Humanitarian Coordinators.

I have vivid recollections of hundreds of thousands of destitute and starving refugees crossing into Malawi to escape the conflict in Mozambique at a time when Malawi's national food reserves were exhausted as a result of drought. Trucks with maize from Zimbabwe were being attacked in the Tete corridor, so we arranged for WFP to buy 25,000 tons of maize from the Zambian food reserves with funds from the UK Government.

In 1992, I argued at the Sant' Egidio Peace Conference in Rome that unless FRELIMO and RENAMO agreed to allow the UN and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to have full humanitarian access to all conflict areas, a million Mozambicans would perish. This intervention resulted in the signing of a joint accord (later that night) between the UN, the Mozambican Government, RENAMO and ICRC. The accord served as the basis for weekly negotiations with FRELIMO and RENAMO (held in my office) for sending relief food and medicine to Mozambique's war-torn communities, and ultimately a peace accord in October 1992.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

When I was chief of the Staffing and Training Branch at WFP headquarters, we negotiated a much more independent role from the Food

and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in order for WFP to take over professional personnel administration. We also negotiated with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) concerning country management and locally recruited WFP staff. Subsequently, WFP Senior Advisers became WFP Directors of Operation and WFP was able to appoint and promote staff without FAO or UNDP approval. We also introduced rotation between the field and

headquarters professional staff in a "Unified Service."

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

I strongly believe that WFP should only consider candidates who have had prior international field experience as interns, volunteers or with NGOs. This should be high on the recruitment criteria for all WFP posts in the field and at headquarters.



## Kenro Oshidari

Lesotho (1990-1993)



### **Mapping Areas of Responsibility In an Emergency**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1989 and my first assignment was in Zambia. During the Southern African drought, I was based in Maseru, Lesotho (1990-1993). I was involved in planning the response within Lesotho, but I did not see the full implementation

because I was sent on a Temporary Duty Assignment to Bosnia in the latter part of 1992.

However, for a larger picture of the drought, we visited some farms on the South African side in order to understand the extent of the risk on large-scale commercial farms. A regional approach was encouraged, and I remember liaising with David Morton in Zimbabwe (Southern African Development Community). David and I were deployed to Bosnia that same year, so I am not too sure how the regional approach proceeded.

In Lesotho, we considered the use of vouchers, since we needed small shops as distribution outlets in remote areas. We traveled around Lesotho to identify these shops, but I am not sure how distribution was organized in the end. WFP also worked with international NGOs in Lesotho (Save the Children, World Vision, CARE) to determine Areas of Responsibilities for distribution. Maps were drawn accordingly.



## **Piero Terranera**

Senior Logistics Officer & Head of Beira Office (1993-1994)



### **A Drive Akin To a Love for Mankind**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in October 1993. After a job well done (rice moved from Pakistan to Bujumbura WFP depot), I was told of the horrific WFP losses in transit and was encouraged by the WFP Representative, Buja, to apply to Tun Myat/Andrew Toh for a job to bring losses under control with commercial methods and generally introduce commercial policies to WFP logistics.

I was located initially in Maputo, Mozambique, and then moved to Beira as Head of Office and WFP Representative in order to manage Logistics & Programme in food interventions in Sofala, Manica, Tete, Zambezia, Inhambane and Niassa.

The Logistics and Programme operations were designed to assist a huge population of beneficiaries both under the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) and the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO)

The 1993/1994 drought badly affected the Southern African region. Fortunately, years of plentiful harvests had filled the strategic food depots in South Africa and Zimbabwe (for the Southern African Development Community (SADC)). Mozambique was badly affected by the drought, especially after a long insurgency that made poor people poorer, living from hand-to-mouth.

Moreover, the quality of their seeds was poor.

Years of brutal insurgency and government repression had left the country bankrupt and without resources. Therefore, an eventual peace process of some sort had to be established. The war had been so brutal that no fertilizer or soil minerals/nutrients or implements had been imported, and much of the soil had gone stale, especially in provinces like Sofala where there were 32 different types of soil structure, which dictates that a variety of crops need to be planted. People had begun to lack basic nutrients in their diet and WFP arrived just in time to those six desperate provinces: Sofala, Manica, Tete, Inhambane, Niassa and Zambesia. One of the major problems in organizing food aid distribution was the fact that all dirt roads were mined, which made it impossible to trade any local surpluses or transport food aid from one province to another.

The six provinces were completely devoid of production statistics or any other statistics and required an immediate needs survey. Although fairly robust, the WFP team was composed of three P3 officers who would have needed months to map out all the needs in the six provinces. Therefore, I asked the logistics teams (we had to use convoy leaders because of the danger of attacks in remote areas and mined tracks everywhere) to assist WFP by stopping by WFP centers and areas to get community leaders to fill out WFP designed

needs questionnaires, there and then.

Initially, it was a hard and dangerous grind because of all the mines on all the non-asphalt roads. We came up with a crude, but effective, way to deal with the mines. We found a construction firm that had a number of tipper trucks and some bulldozers for hire. The bulldozers would travel ahead of the trucks and scoop all the mines, some of which exploded. When the blade had too many, the dozer buried them safely in a hole with a well-marked sign posted. It was slow, dangerous and heartbreaking work, but in a few months we cleared all the main roads in the six provinces that the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), FRELIMO, and donors in general were worried about. At the same time, we were able to hire a single mine-proof five ton truck (*Chipoko* or "spirit" in Shona) from a Zimbabwean farmer, which I used to lead convoys to remote areas along the Zambezi environs where it was impossible to send bulldozers. The *Chipoko* was good for travel on those remote mined roads, ensuring a mine-free pathway, which our guys marked very well. Not only were we able to feed everyone in need, we also reopened inter-regional commerce, thanks to all the roads we made safe.

Fifteen years of a cruel insurgency on top of a long independence struggle had gutted Mozambique in both rural and urban areas. It had become very difficult to grow food because of the varied soil structure,

which had become unbalanced, and the minerals needed to aid soil recovery weren't available. Fortunately, food aid was delivered just in time and it saved the lives of many people. But even donors were somewhat cavalier, sending stack-burned maize grain. Stack-burn occurs when grain has been stored beyond mid-term periods. We received nearly 17,000 mt of grains from one of the big WFP donors, which was somewhat bitter to eat because of stack-burn. The FRELIMO local authority refused to distribute the grains, stating that people would refuse it.

Many of the communities were disorganized as they were emerging from a very long and bloody civil conflict, but they were always ready to help us deliver food aid to difficult areas when asked. For example, I recall one of our food aid delivery trips to a RENAMO base on the tributary of the river Licurio in Zambezia. It had rained, which made it difficult to get the truck across, so we called people from the local community to ferry bags of food across the flooded stream and then carry them for more kilometers to the RENAMO camp, surrounded by mines. It was not a job for the faint-hearted.

As a matter of principle, we always delivered food aid to women because they were better administrators for the monthly supply of foodstuffs, making sure the entire family was fed, and would not exchange any of the food for, say, cane alcohol or such items.

We were in touch with the local governors of the six provinces and followed their signals to affected communities even when we knew the request was dictated by vested interests. I dispatched WFP officers to study the problem and make suitable recommendations for their resolution.

In terms of collaboration, I can only speak for the few NGOs that worked with WFP. Our work and cooperation were excellent. I cannot speak for the other UN entities, because we met infrequently (at the beck and call of the Secretary General's Special Envoy) and the communication was usually one way, as our reports appeared not to have been read.

I have memories of the abject poverty in which too many Mozambicans lived. I also remember when one of our convoys hit a mine (fortunately there was only one injury). I received a radio call in my office, but the convoy leader could not hear me because of atmospheric low pressures. However, I was able to get the operator in Maputo (1500 kms southwest, while the explosion happened less than 400 kms north) to relay my questions to the convoy leader on site. I estimated the area with the help of a map and called DPKO to help by sending a helicopter to the site of the explosion. The search went on for most of the afternoon, but the convoy could not be found until someone tried 200 kms further north and found a spot with markers identical to where the convoy had waited. That was when I scoured the Internet (as it was then)



to see if there were any of the new GPS on the market. I found only one, a hand-held, called Magellan and immediately bought it for each convoy leader. That is a vivid memory I made sure never to experience again.

After the harvest, I asked all WFP personnel in the Beira office to monitor the prices of the new grains and saw that they were much lower than those of previous years, because either via recipients' sale to vendors or the illicit sale of WFP grains by local authorities, the abundance of grain pressured the new grains to be sold at prices at least 50 percent cheaper than the previous year's prices. So we recommended that WFP consider reducing distributions to obviate the glut of grain on the market. With necessary precautions, it worked very well.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

WFP organizational/structural changes, like anywhere, were dictated by a rapidly changing operational situation, which is the case in most complex emergencies. As a trained manager, I view anticipating these changes as a

normal part of my job and that is one reason why my interventions, even the most brutally heartbreaking, were all successful. But it must be said that because of its non-commercial orientation in general, WFP is not replete with trained managers and sometimes changes, be they organizational or structural, can take quite a while to be implemented.

### **What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

A short-term job at WFP would benefit most people because WFP's way of looking at problem-solving is very different from what dictates action in a commercial organization. This experience can be used to a great advantage when progressing to a key managerial position. The downside of working in an organization where a career path is not necessarily mapped by true meritocracy is obvious. A career with WFP implies possessing a drive akin to a vocation/love for mankind rather than an ambition/desire to prove oneself and succeed. The newfangled interest, within humanitarian organizations, to value appearances more than substance, can and does complicate any personal objectives to which one might aspire.

## **Nicole Menage**

Country Director, Zimbabwe (1992-1997)



### **Selecting Beneficiaries Without Discrimination**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in June 1983 after serving two years as a UN Volunteer for the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) in Burundi.

I was based in Harare, Zimbabwe, from mid 1991-1997 and I witnessed the Southern African drought of the early 1990s. I was posted to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, from mid 2000-

2004 when the next regional drought took place in Southern Africa.

The Southern African drought emergency of the early 1990s was particularly pronounced because South Africa, in addition to other countries in the region, was badly affected. South Africa and Zimbabwe were the two largest maize baskets in the region. Since sanctions

imposed on South Africa had not yet been lifted, it was still quite detached from the rest of the region.

Throughout much of the 1980s, the “maize train” from Zimbabwe served Mozambique as well as a number of countries in the region, while the conflict was ongoing in Mozambique. The political dynamics of the region presented complex challenges, particularly on the logistical front. WFP operation tapped into practically all ports, railway and trucking capacity in the area—overcoming many barriers. Staff members were strategically posted to major transportation hubs, including Spoornet, the national railway of South Africa (where Arnt Breivik served), as well as the ports of Mozambique and South Africa.

WFP also established a Logistics Advisory Center (LAC) in Harare. As part of its logistics coordination role, LAC closely monitored the movements of food assistance provided by WFP and other organizations along the many corridors that fed into the regional network. The data collection and analysis tool used was quite sophisticated for its time, since many WFP offices were still experiencing the advent of the computer age. This tool was originally the brainchild of David Morton, who was the Area Director for Southern Africa, based in Harare until the end of 1992. A weekly report was generated and shared with major players in the drought emergency, including USAID and other bilateral agencies, as well as NGOs. It is important to note that a government representative as well

as a Southern African Development Community (SADC) liaison was attached to LAC. These were Ron Sibanda, who was Permanent Secretary of the Zimbabwean Ministry of Transport, and Rick Corsino, who was with SADC.

I was posted to Harare, Zimbabwe, in mid 1991 as Program Officer when the drought began to accelerate. Zimbabwe was hard-hit by the drought and therefore had a significant country specific drought operation, including both general distribution and supplementary feeding components. I became Country Director of Zimbabwe toward the end of 1992 when David was posted to former Yugoslavia. LAC, although also based in Harare, was headed by Tony Mornement, in a separate office. We often interacted with LAC and other offices in the region because Zimbabwe was a regional transport hub at the time. The Regional Communications Officer, Mercedes Sayagues, was based in our office too. Harare was the regional hub for most organizations and bilateral agencies at the time and strong weekly coordination meetings of the main actors, chaired by the UN Resident Representative, took place there.

I remained in Zimbabwe until mid 1997, witnessed the gradual downsizing of the operation, and saw the return to widespread local and regional food procurement in the region. I contributed to many evaluations of the operation, which were prepared in the aftermath by a variety of organizations that were involved. Although far from perfect

and not free from criticism, the Southern African drought operation of the early 1990s still remains in my memory as a very impressive feat and an example of admirable regional cooperation (on many levels) in the face of a major crisis.

I was based in Tanzania as Country Director (2000-2004) during the drought of the early 2000s and logistical support was provided through the port of Dar es Salaam, but I was not involved in the operation as directly as I had been in the drought of the early 1990s. South Africa was not as affected by this later drought as it had been by the one a decade earlier. Since the sanctions imposed on South Africa had been lifted, the country was selling large amounts of food to WFP. During both periods, the fact that there were two subsequent years of drought contributed to their gravity. Many of us who had experienced the drought of the early 1990s were struck by how many more staff members were dedicated to the operation in the early 2000s, even though the depth of this drought was somewhat less severe on the regional level. This tendency to attach a large number of staff members to emergency operations was definitely a trend that continued over the years. It is hard to assess the way in which, and by how much, our responses have improved with this scale up, though I believe a few efforts have been made to study this point, including using these two different Southern African regional drought operations as case studies.

There was sadly widespread under-nutrition in Zimbabwe during the drought of the 1990s, some of which existed before the drought, so the resilience of many people was worn down and their limited assets depleted. The intensity of the needs in different parts of the country was mainly assessed through field visits and beneficiary contact interviews, mixed with a little extrapolation. The government agricultural figures were also studied, along with data from FEWSNET and other early warning and food security analysis systems that were in place, in order to further determine the scale and impact of the drought on various communities.

I believe food assistance was very valuable in averting famine. A valiant effort was made to assess and meet the needs of beneficiaries, but the political backdrop in Zimbabwe was sometimes a challenge. The affected communities were often involved in helping us determine those who were most in need within their communities and in partitioning what was provided. Women formed the greatest part of the agricultural workforce and were often the primary caregivers in the family, so they were very hard-hit. Therefore, they were particularly appreciative of the assistance provided.

The government ultimately had purview over the drought operation in Zimbabwe, as was the case in most countries in the region. SADC, as the main regional organization present, played a significant role on the inter-governmental level. I felt that there was very good cooperation between most of the

actors involved, largely due to the coordination mechanisms that were established under the auspices of the UN Resident Representative and the Donor Group, as well as WFP, particularly on the logistical front. The flow of information and data on the movement of food and other forms of assistance were admirable.

**What are your general reflections on your time and work with WFP?**

I began working for WFP at a time when it was much smaller and more like a family, bringing many of the positive and negative sides that come with that. I have strong memories of the comradeship that was shown by many of the staff who were part of the operation at country, regional and headquarters levels. We were always able to share a laugh here and there to keep our morale and energy up, even during some very stressful times. Since we were fewer in most of our field offices, we had greater exposure to the different aspects of our work,

ranging from program through logistics, early on. As we grew, staff members necessarily became more specialized in one domain or another, and I think that as a result, WFP is more compartmentalized now, and perhaps losing a little of its versatility on the individual level.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

I encourage staff members that are starting out to remember that it is a privilege to serve those in need and emphasize the importance of gaining an in-depth understanding of the texture of food security in the countries where they are posted. I also highlight that our beneficiaries are often, sadly, voiceless, and warn that we must be prepared to work in conflict and other politically complex situations. I add that it is not always easy to distinguish who is right or wrong, and our needs assessments must be based on objective criteria, selecting beneficiaries without discrimination.

**Catherine Bertini**  
Executive Director (1992-2002)



*Catherine Bertini- Mozambique, WFP/Tom Haskell*

**Leadership and Direction  
In the Face of Multiple Emergencies**

I was with the World Food Programme (WFP) from 1992-2002. During the Southern African drought, I was based at our headquarters in Rome, Italy.

In 1992, WFP was confronted with several emergencies, particularly the conflicts in Somalia and Bosnia, and the Southern African drought. Each of these emergencies required major efforts from WFP.

My overall role during the Southern African drought emergency was to offer leadership, direction, interaction/diplomacy with the UN, and approvals (within official guidance) for our operations. I also visited some of the affected

countries. People faced severe needs such as lack of food and water. Some families had to sell their assets to purchase food.

Some of the tools used to identify needs were WFP assessment and logistics missions. The logistics missions were critical to the unique process of the Southern African drought emergency response.

Overall, the organization did very well in meeting the needs of the population. We were efficient in engaging community leaders, governments, NGOs and other UN agencies. WFP food assistance was lifesaving.

Women in the affected communities served as cooks, mothers, and family providers. At WFP organizational level, we had almost no female professional staff. There were only 17 percent of women by the end of 1991. Louise Sobon, the only woman Country Director, was based in Lusaka, Zambia, at the time.

Some of my most vivid and memorable experiences during the emergency were meeting children in an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp in Mozambique, women feeding their families at centers in Zimbabwe, and visiting the WFP logistics center in Johannesburg, South Africa. In addition to our WFP staff, I invited Ricardo Valesquez, Chair of the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA) and Representative of Mexico, to join our delegation.

Our biggest operational challenge was that most of the affected countries were landlocked, and the two that were not (Mozambique and Angola) were engulfed in civil wars. Our logistics group, led by Tun Myat, recommended that we use South African ports. However, apartheid was still in place and the UN could not officially work with the country. Only the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) had a formal agreement with the government to work there.

Tun was the intellectual leader of this entire operation. He and his logistics group were creative, bold, out of the box thinkers and smooth implementers. Without them, we would never have been as successful

as we were, and thousands of people may not have survived.

The logistics proposal was that we operate in the country under the UNHCR, but work only with the South African ports and railways, and not with the government. This was highly controversial, even in our own organization, where this proposal to the Executive Director was stalled in my office and not presented to me. It was mentioned verbally, though, by Tun Myat, and the memo was then found and approved.

Key to the drought response was the newly created UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), which began operations as of January 1992. Its leader, Jan Eliasson, was critical to the creation of DHA and its early operation. Regarding the drought, Jan decided that since the victims of the Southern African drought primarily needed food, WFP should be the lead agency in the response. Thus, WFP played a leadership role for all the other UN agencies.

Second, DHA, and Jan in particular, played a crucial role in ensuring that our proposal to work with the South African ports and railroads was approved. Even border crossings during apartheid were problematic. WFP presented our proposal to him, he discussed it with the Secretary General and with the Chair of the Africa Group, and then Jan authorized us to proceed, carefully. And so we did.

The logistics department recruited representatives from each landlocked country to be posted at our center in Johannesburg. That way, each country could follow the movement of food scheduled to arrive, and each representative could help supervise the process and ensure easy passage. From all I recall, the process worked very well. Of course, WFP staff in each country were essential to insuring successful operations. Donors were very aware of what we were doing and were generous.

There was some, but surprisingly very little press coverage of the drought and the relief efforts. That was also before WFP had a proactive Public Relations group.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with the WFP?**

Being part of WFP was the most challenging and rewarding role I have ever had. I am proud to be a part of an extremely dedicated group of thousands of people who work to end hunger. One of the long-term benefits is a continued membership of a worldwide WFP family.

### **What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

If you want to be, as Masood Hyder eloquently says, part of something bigger than yourself, consider WFP. If you want real challenge, tough assignments, adventure and reward, consider WFP. If you want to go to sleep at night knowing you helped people survive, consider WFP. If you want to become part of a large family for the rest of your life, consider WFP.





## Jean-Jacques Graisse

Senior Deputy Executive Director (2004-2008)



*Jean-Jacques Graisse, WFP/Rein Skullerud*

### **Facing El Niño in the Largest Humanitarian Organization**

Catherine Bertini offered me the post of Assistant Executive Director (Operations) in 1995, and I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) on January 1, 1996. I had been Assistant Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

We became aware of a serious problem developing in Asia and Africa as a result of the 1997 El Niño. Our attention was directed to Southern Africa a few years later. I was Deputy Executive Director at the time. The Public Affairs Director saw an opportunity to get good media coverage. WFP established an El Niño Task Force of which I would become chairman. Keen on learning more about El Niño, the media was

interested in our press releases and in interviews with WFP staff.

I will not detail programmatic matters that will be covered much better by former Country Directors and the Regional Bureau. I will simply refer to the opening of a Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, the region that was going to be most affected by the drought. I undertook a mission to the region and visited Nairobi and Harare. Georgia Shaver, who was our Regional Manager for Southern Africa and Country Director for Mozambique, joined me in my visit to South Africa in September 2000. Kenyan authorities could not offer help or special advantages toward opening a Regional Bureau since Nairobi was already hosting many UN Regional Representations. Anyhow, a location further south was more desirable.

In those days Zimbabwe was still a source of maize procurement and we had a Procurement Office in Harare. My discussions with the Procurement Officer, the Resident Coordinator, and the Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office, which had been moved from Brazzaville to Harare because of the unstable situation in Brazzaville, were not encouraging.

The authorities in Pretoria were much more positive. At the time there was no UN Regional Office in South Africa and the government was interested in hosting one. The government's offer of office space

was, however, limited to Pretoria, which was not enjoying a particularly good security situation.

Johannesburg was not better in that respect, but it was more convenient from a logistics point of view, and it had suitable office space. Cape Town was a desirable location regarding quality of life for staff, but it did not offer the convenience of Johannesburg, in terms of flights to all countries in the region. A decision was thus made to open the office in Johannesburg in 2002. Sadly, shortly after opening, the office suffered a violent robbery and one national staff, who had just been recruited, was killed.

I was also involved in a difficult discussion surrounding the GMO maize we received from the USA. The Government of Zambia, under pressure from the church (only God can modify), insisted that we re-export the maize to other countries in the region.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with the WFP?**

In my 45 years of service to the United Nations, I always tried to move to an agency that was most relevant at the time: UNDP in the 1960s; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which was created after the Stockholm

Conference on Environment and Development of 1972, in the 1970s; and the International Trade Centre in the 1980s after the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank advocated export-led growth. After six years as Resident Coordinator in Kenya and Assistant Administrator of UNDP in the 1990s, I became very interested in the largest humanitarian organization.

The late 1990s and the years 2000 saw the growth and significance of humanitarian assistance and food aid in particular. I was lucky to have been selected by Catherine Bertini as Assistant Executive Director, then Deputy Executive Director after the departure of Namanga Ngongi in 2001. Under the very effective leadership of Catherine Bertini, WFP became a vibrant organization that played a significant role in development and emergency operations.

### **What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

At my annual meeting in Rome with newly recruited Junior Professional Officers (JPO), I always asked them to promise that they would not want to reach retirement at WFP. The UN system needs mobility and the great experience gained at WFP could be of considerable help to other organizations of the UN system.

**2000-2010**



*Josette Sheeran (Sudan), /WFP Emilia Casella*

## Angela Van Rynbach

Country Director, Indonesia (2007-2009)  
Deputy Regional Director, East and Central Africa Bureau (2006-2007)  
Country Director, Mozambique (2001-2006) and Swaziland (2002-2004) Deputy  
Regional Director, Asia and Eastern Europe Bureau (1998-2001) Country  
Director, India (1997-1998)  
Deputy Country Director, India (1993-1996)  
Program Officer, Bangladesh (1986-1989)  
Program Officer, WFP HQ (1981-1985)



### **Resilience In the Face Of a Triple Threat**

During the period I worked in Southern Africa (2001-2006), the region experienced a “Triple Threat” that included drought, HIV/AIDS, and issues of capacity to respond. This combination of problems compounded the crisis, intensifying the impact of a natural emergency with a health epidemic, thereby straining the delivery of services.

Swaziland had the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the world at the time. The prevalence rates in parts of Mozambique also reached over 20 percent. In response to the HIV/AIDS and drought crisis in Swaziland, WFP reopened its office and set up field operation in 2002. The drought continued for several years and the response each year

was tailored to the results of the food and crop assessments and nutritional data.

The health crisis resulted in increasing numbers of orphans and vulnerable children, mounting number of cases of mother-to-child HIV transmission, and increasing number of people living with HIV/AIDS. The impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic also touched our staff and their families, as well as our counterparts and NGO partners. There were no anti-retroviral (ARV) medications available for the first few years and the network for health and social services was limited. Malnutrition among children under five reached emergency level, so we had to design responses with our partners to meet those needs. We also worked to address the nutrition needs of pregnant and lactating women, orphans and vulnerable children, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

Finding ways to scale up programs and develop innovative responses were major challenges for all involved. When communities were reeling from the effects of successive droughts, a challenge was to improve food security. Key strategies included drought-resistant crop promotion, community-level work, and expanding school feeding. In collaboration with partners, we provided nutrition support along with access to ARVs and improved health services, while extending food support through social safety nets. We had many inter-agency and donor missions, support teams, and evaluations. We worked closely with,

among others, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNAIDS, cooperating partners, donors and government counterparts. When we participated in the design of the various phases of the Regional Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO), all these groups contributed.

Drought-affected communities consistently identified sustainable livelihoods as a priority. Filling gaps in food security during the lean months after crop losses was a major concern. Another key need identified was keeping children in school and supplementing their food needs, while providing extra rations to Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC). Households headed by OVCs and those admitting such children required additional food support. Moreover, nutrition support was identified as crucial for malnourished patients. People living with HIV/AIDS also needed nutritional support, especially those undergoing ARV treatment, and for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT).

During this period, coordination and improvement of food security assessment (VAM) systems received a lot of support from all partners concerned, as did strengthening of capacities for nutritional surveys. WFP participated actively in the Regional Food Security Assessment

Network that developed methodologies, indicators, and carried out joint assessments regularly.

In close collaboration with UNICEF and other partners, we focused on improving capacity and tools for surveying nutritional status, particularly for children under five, within agreed protocols for assessing varying degrees of severity of malnutrition. UNAIDS promoted common methodologies and common reporting on HIV/AIDS prevalence in affected countries.

Regular household monitoring also contributed to identifying needs, especially of coping mechanisms and livelihood concerns. This was an important new step and it was worth the effort. Adequately meeting the needs of beneficiaries depended on various factors, some within our control and others not. Monthly monitoring reports from cooperating partners gave us a picture of the number of beneficiaries reached against our targets, the amount of food distributed and where, and any significant bottlenecks. We used the data to adjust our pipeline and distribution plans. Owing to resource constraints, as well as supply chain or partner capacity issues, we faced gaps in meeting our targets. We managed to meet the needs of a majority of the most affected people, but the worry about pipeline breaks was always on our minds.

From monitoring and evaluations, we learned a lot about the effectiveness of our aid. When school enrolment and attendance increased, when

visits to HIV/AIDS clinics went up and treatment regimes were followed, when helpful community infrastructure was built and drought-resistant crops were adopted, we felt that we had contributed to helping people. In the end, that was what really counted. But we also realized that we still had more to do.

There were concerns about the adequate involvement and benefits for women, and the representation of the poorest members of communities. We ensured that community committees were organized to address those concerns. Community members, particularly parents, were involved in supporting school feeding. Smaller community groups played critical roles in the care and support for OVCs and people affected by HIV/AIDS.

We had guidelines that sought to ensure the participation of women in designing programs that benefitted them. For instance, women were active in planting drought-resistant crops and taking care of seedlings in nurseries. We also emphasized the importance of getting girls to enroll in school and maintain attendance. We gave special rations for maintaining attendance. Women were disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, especially in areas with high worker migration rates. Once medications were made available at PMTCT clinics, pregnant women and their babies got a chance to receive treatment. We also made an effort to recruit more women staff, including field monitors who stayed in the villages, drivers, and warehouse staff.



The urgency of seeking help for people affected by drought and HIV/AIDS struck me from the first day I landed in Mozambique. How could we identify and reach many people? What were the best ways to help? How could we help build capacity to do so? How could we strengthen our staff capacity, develop logistics supply chains and delivery mechanisms? I will always be grateful to the staff who worked in WFP country offices, the regional office that supported us, UN teams in Swaziland and Mozambique, donors that funded us, NGOs that worked with us, and the governments faced with daunting challenges. Most importantly, I was impressed and moved by the resilience of the people whose lives we touched. I still think of them and what they had to face.

This brings to mind images from field trips. Once I was accompanying a donor delegate from our Executive Board. We were on the outskirts of the port city of Beira, meeting with families affected by HIV/AIDS. We met several families affected by HIV/AIDS and learned about their stories first-hand. We sat on the sandy ground and chatted with a sister-in-law and brother-in-law, along with some young children. They told us they were the sole survivors in their respective families, having lost their spouses to AIDS. They too were ill and still trying to keep the children together and the family going. A faith-based community group was helping to care for and support such families, for whom we gave food assistance.

Such field visits brought home, very starkly, what the "AIDS epidemic" meant in human terms. Sadly, this was one of many such encounters that I had with affected families.

In Swaziland, we gave food support to Neighborhood Care Centers for OVCs, among other activities. It was usually a grandmotherly figure from the community who gathered children, took care of them during the day, and fed them a meal. When we visited households left in care of an adolescent orphan, we witnessed the decline of a family, but also the support given by community groups and WFP.

I enjoyed visiting schools and spending time with children. Their enthusiasm was contagious. The arrival of ARVs for HIV/AIDS and the possibility of treatment also offered a ray of hope. At PMTCT clinics, I saw receptions full of pregnant women waiting for a chance to be tested, and if positive, receive treatment. The results were heartwarming.

I was pleased when innovative projects were successful. One example was a joint collaboration with FAO and the Mozambican Ministry of Agriculture for the implementation of junior farmer fields and life skills training. Adolescents were trained in life skills and agriculture, thereby giving them a chance to become farmers. Another example was the launching of Play Pumps to provide water to schools. Thanks to a donation of USD 500,000 from TPG, the Netherlands Postal Service, and with support from a series of TPG volunteers, we

were able to bring these pumps to Mozambique.

**What are your general reflections on your time and work with the WFP?**

We experienced organizational and structural transformation during this period at a pretty rapid pace. As part of the decentralization process, having a regional bureau based in Johannesburg starting in 2002 was a positive step. In addition, a few other UN agency staff moved into the same office building, facilitating joint programming and regular communication. As part of UN reform, UN agencies made greater efforts to work together. This was reflected in the shared approaches taken to address the “Triple Threat.”

Many times, I thought, how amazing it was to have a job that took me to the far corners of countries, gave me the opportunity to meet and work with people from many countries,

and to contribute to helping people in their time of need. Sure, there was often a tremendous amount of stress and pressure, along with insecurity, but I hope the work we did made a difference. The camaraderie and solidarity that my colleagues and I shared made me feel stronger in the face of challenges.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

I would recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career working with WFP to consider that everyone contributes in one way or another to the mission of fighting hunger. Being resilient, willing to work with different cultures, having a strong sense of compassion and being open to change are all helpful qualities. I hope that in the future others will have a chance to experience the responsibilities and the challenges of humanitarian work.



## Owen Calvert

VAM Officer, Southern Africa (1994-2006)



### **An Innovative Organization That Gets Things Done**

I consulted with the World Food Programme (WFP) on various assignments in East Africa (1994-1999), Southern Africa (2001-2005) and Washington, D.C. (2005-2006).

I was based in Maputo, Mozambique, (2001-2005) and had regional responsibilities mostly in Swaziland and Lesotho. I also did some work in Malawi and Zambia.

My perspective is purely from the Vulnerability Assessment Mapping (VAM) side, where I was doing assessments and getting consensus on numbers and locations for targeting. I think the first thing that really hit me was the scale and complexity of the emergencies. It was a combination of drought and HIV/AIDS during a period when Zimbabwe was going through a major political and economic crisis.

Working across and coordinating responses in six countries was a challenge. There was also the urgency of getting the numbers and identifying hotspots for pulling the appeal together. VAM officers, mostly for Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland participated in the Crop and Food Security Assessment Missions (CFSAM) and the Vulnerability Assessment Committees (VAC). We helped bring the total numbers together.

We used the VAC questionnaire in our assessments. Given that it was a regional emergency, there was a need for a common tool to ensure consistency across countries. In addition, this was not only about food; health, nutrition, water, etc. were all issues, and so the various sectors needed to be involved.

It was a major effort to ensure that everyone, including governments, NGOs and the UN, was onboard. At the same time, the challenge was to accommodate everyone's wishes and demands, to get their questions included, and to follow their guidelines. Needless to say, there were differences of opinion and anyone involved in the VAC meeting at Victoria Falls (2004) would remember the passion and tension that ensued. The result was that the questionnaire was long and tedious. There were concerns about beneficiary fatigue as well as how all the information was going to get analyzed.

It was also the first time that a large-scale use of Personal Digital Assistants (PDA) for data collection was implemented—considerable time was spent developing and testing the programme. I also recall dealing with issues of unreliable population numbers (especially for Zimbabwe) and Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) issues (Zambia). There was also a big and complicated debate about how to account for cassava in some countries, which was not included on cereal balance sheets. The bottom line was that, despite some delays, figures were produced across six countries and there was a general recognition that a common tool was in fact the way to go.

At the technical level, I think there was good collaboration through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) VACs, albeit with different perspectives, capacities and experiences. The UN agencies and NGOs involved also worked together pretty well, noting that there were differences between countries.

During the emergency, I recall that Angela Van Rynbach and I made a visit to some of the most affected (drought and HIV) areas in Swaziland. We randomly stopped at a rural house and interviewed a grandmother. Her daughter had recently died and we could hear her son-in-law coughing in agony in the hut behind us—very likely a secondary infection. The

grandmother was clearly the caregiver, but given her age, she was certainly not in a position to support her grandchildren. After hearing her story, there was no way we could drive away without leaving her something, but at the same time, there were many, many more similar situations.

In some villages, we visited, say, 10-12 houses, and it was obvious that at least three or four were empty/recently vacated, which was another sign of families losing a parent or parents. I still remember that the funeral parlors were by far the newest and nicest buildings in rural towns in Lesotho.

When we finally came up with the number of people in need of emergency assistance, Brenda Barton (Information Officer) asked me: "So how much food is that?" She wanted a reference, a visual, something she could relate to. I think my calculation was: "Semi trucks, fully loaded with food and parked bumper to bumper, stretching from Maputo to Jo'burg [Johannesburg]" or "A soccer field stacked with food 400 meters high."

### **What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

It is a great experience with a very innovative organization that gets things done. The individual needs to be willing to get on the frontline and get boots dirty.

## Mike Sackett

Regional Director, Southern Africa, (June 2003 - May 2006)  
Regional Director, Southern Africa, (2003-2006)  
Deputy Regional Director, Southern Africa, (Jan 2003-June 2003)  
Resident Coordinator, Sudan, (July-September 2002)  
Resident Coordinator, Afghanistan, (June 2001-February 2002)  
Regional Manager, Central Asia, covering Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, and Tajikistan and concurrently Country Director of Pakistan, (2000-2001)  
Country Director, Afghanistan (1999-2000)  
South Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea, (1996-1998)  
Country Director, Kenya (1993-1998)  
Regional Manager, Horn of Africa, (Kenya, South Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti and Eritrea), (1996-1998)



*Mike Sackett (right) with OPEC Fund Representative, WFP/Benson Gono*

## Non-discrimination In Food Distribution

I worked for the Governments of Vanuatu (1969-1971) and Papua New Guinea (1972-78) before joining the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as a Marketing Economist in Tanzania (1979-1984). In January 1984, I started working for the World Food Programme (WFP) and was assigned to Bangladesh as Deputy Country Director, and later, Acting Country Director (1985-1988). Afterwards, I served as Chief of the

Project Programming Branch at WFP headquarters, Rome, (1988-1993).

The Southern African droughts of (2001-2003) and (2015-2017) are good examples of slow onset emergencies. Unlike the damage wrought by typhoons and earthquakes (sudden onset emergencies), the gestation period for a drought tends to be many months. There is almost too much time to prepare, and as a result,

action in the early stages tends to be too slow—leading to a scramble later on.

I initially worked for a manager who was effective at getting attention and mobilizing resources. For the five months we worked together, we had a mutually agreed division of responsibilities. She focused on the Regional Emergency Operation, responding to the droughts in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe, while I handled Angola, Madagascar and other ancillary issues.

By June 2003, when I took over as Regional Director, the worst of the drought response had been completed. Nonetheless, food distributions continued at a high level in the hunger season (November 2003–March 2004), especially in Zimbabwe where food security problems were compounded by the collapse of the economy. Essentially, the chronology of 2001-2003 in comparison with 2015-2017 was as follows:

<u>Stage</u>	<u>2001-03</u>	<u>2015-17</u>
Onset	Mid 2001	Mid 2015
Peak crop loss	Early 2002	Early 2016
Peak food assistance	Nov 2002–March 2003	Nov 2016–March 2017

My assessment was that in 2002-2004 WFP mobilized a substantial quantity of much-needed food and managed to distribute it in a reasonably timely manner. It was greatly appreciated by governments and communities, and I have no doubt it contributed to the saving of thousands of lives. In addition, a number of thematic issues come to mind:

### **HIV/AIDS in relation to food security**

It was probably only during the Southern African drought response (2002-2004) that we came to realize the devastating societal consequences of the HIV/AIDS epidemic at the time. The prevalence rates in all of the six countries, according to UNAIDS, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization

(WHO), ranged from 20-40 percent. The highest of all was Lesotho, where the prevalence rate was well over 40 percent and every weekend was dominated by a succession of funerals for people who had succumbed during the week. It affected families from all strata of society, from Permanent Secretaries to the humblest worker. HIV/AIDS also had massive food security implications because it primarily affected the most productive members of society, within the 30-50 year age bracket. One devastating outcome was that elderly grandparents were left to care for their children’s offsprings. When talking to beneficiaries in the field, we frequently heard from people in their 60s and 70s who stated that they had expected to be cared for in their old age by their children, but faced the prospect of

being carers for orphaned grandchildren. Living conditions for such families were exacerbated by the drought, so WFP included AIDS orphans as a category of beneficiaries.

It is interesting to compare that situation with the current one. My impression thus far is that HIV/AIDS is a less significant factor today. The widespread use of anti-retrovirals to treat and prevent AIDS has been very positive.

### **Inter-agency collaboration**

Efforts were made from 2003 onwards to tackle the Southern African drought on an inter UN agency basis. A major unifying factor was the appointment of WFP Executive Director, Jim Morris, as the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Southern Africa. I recall that he would travel to the region a couple of times a year, each time visiting one or more of the six affected countries. At times, he traveled with other UN agency heads; for example, Carol Bellamy of UNICEF and Peter Piot of UNAIDS, which truly emphasized the commitment to inter-agency collaboration.

WFP really led the way, hosting the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), FAO, UNICEF, UNAIDS and perhaps others, in the building at Sunninghill, Johannesburg, which it first occupied in May 2002. This led to the establishment of the Regional Inter-Agency Standing Committee (RIASCO), an inter-agency group meeting at the Regional Director

level, which is still active today. FAO had a couple of highly competent and motivated technical staff in Johannesburg who reported, through their sub-regional office in Harare, directly to Rome. UNICEF had two out-posted people from their Regional Office in Nairobi. I recall that collaboration with UNICEF went from marginal to full around November 2003 when the UNICEF Executive Director gave clear instructions to that effect. The collaboration with UNAIDS was also collegial and constructive.

### **Regional food procurement**

WFP received a substantial proportion of its resources in the form of cash in 2001-2003. At that time, cash distributions were virtually unknown and the major use of this cash was to buy and transport food. WFP tendered for white maize, which is vastly preferred by beneficiaries to the US yellow corn. The major WFP supplier was Grain South Africa, which essentially was a national level farmer-owned cooperative. I recall representing WFP and delivering the keynote address at their national convention around May 2003. The convention had as its theme, the Emergency Food Assistance Needs of Southern Africa.

I may be wrong, but my impression is that in 1992-1994, a major source of WFP's regionally procured maize was Zimbabwe. At that time, white settler farms were still highly productive and Zimbabwe enjoyed a considerable surplus, which WFP was able to access at competitive prices. In contrast, by 2001-2003, white



settler farms had been seized, maize production had collapsed, and WFP was shipping 100,000-200,000 tons of maize to Zimbabwe per annum.

A major issue at that time was the importation of Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) foods. I recall seeking advice from the University of London, Faculty of Agriculture, in December 2002, to gain an independent and technical view of GMO grains. Their advice was that there was little agricultural justification for the concern. The issue was largely political and trade-related.

Finally, I have an anecdote that is both revealing and perhaps amusing. One of WFP donors in 2003 was the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Fund, which donated approximately USD 5 million that WFP used in a number of countries, including Zimbabwe. Representatives of the OPEC Fund decided to visit the region some time in 2004 in order to see how their money was spent. We decided to take them to Zimbabwe. When President Mugabe heard that representatives of the OPEC Fund were in town, he requested that they meet with him. I tagged along, and I recall a lengthy discussion between the Government of Zimbabwe and the OPEC Fund representatives. Eventually, President Mugabe turned to me and said, "And what have WFP got to say for themselves?" What an opportunity! I simply replied, "Sir, I

just wish to remind everyone in the room that WFP's food is distributed on the basis of need, not political affiliation." It clearly was not an everyday occurrence for His Excellency to be addressed so forthrightly!

Underlying my comment was the major problem WFP field staff faced in Zimbabwe, where local officials sometimes suggested that only the Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front (Zanu—PF) supporters should receive WFP food. WFP staff countered this with the mantra, "Food is distributed on the basis of need, not political affiliation." WFP asserted that its food distributions would be immediately suspended should there be any departure from this norm. I can only recall one instance when the suspension of food distribution became necessary. That was the unwavering strength of WFP's position on this issue—thanks to the courage and resolve of the Country Director, Kevin Farrell, and his staff.

I retired from WFP in May 2006. I still undertake occasional consultancies with WFP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the European Union (EU). I am currently (February 4, 2017–March 31, 2017) leading a Lessons Learned Exercise for WFP's Emergency Service (OSE) on WFP Response to the 2015-2017 El Niño episode in Southern Africa.

## Judith Ann Lewis

Director, WFP US Relations (2003-2006)  
Regional Director, Southern Africa and UN Secretary General's Coordinator for  
Southern African Drought (2002-2003)  
Regional Director, East and Southern Africa (2001-2002)  
Representative and Country Director, Ethiopia (1999-2002)  
Chief of Staff, WFP Headquarters, Rome (1992-1997)



*Judith Ann, WFP/Inyene Udoyen*

### **Maintaining An Old Reputation In a New Crisis**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1992 at the request of the Executive Director, Catherine Bertini. At the onset of the Southern African drought, I was tasked with establishing a new regional office based in Johannesburg, South Africa (2002-2003). I served as the Regional Director for all WFP operations in this new region. Subsequently, the UN Secretary General asked me to serve as the UN Special Representative, charged with coordinating all UN and NGO

operations involved in the humanitarian response for the countries affected by the drought.

There were many challenges to handle during the emergency. One of the challenges we faced to delivering timely food was the delays produced by issues surrounding Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) foods. All but one of the counties experiencing the drought raised issues around GMOs. Huge delays were experienced while we worked to

solve that problem. The other major challenge was logistics. Much of the infrastructure necessary for regional deliveries was outdated and in ill repair. The problems were exacerbated by the fact that four of the countries involved in the drought efforts were landlocked. Logistics focused on port/truck/rail operations through multiple jurisdictions. The umbrella challenge, organizationally, was the establishment of a new regional office, staffing in that office and rushing to get additional staff on the ground in-country to manage the response.

In addition to the food and nutrition needs, we discovered another overarching need—HIV/AIDS was at epidemic proportions in Southern Africa. On the drought side, people needed food, potable water and proper cooking utensils. Almost immediately, we realized how important food assistance could be/was to populations affected by HIV—keeping mothers and fathers alive longer to avoid early orphans. Also, we realized the desperate need for HIV medications. We certainly raised the flags and began the dialogue with global players. We did not have widespread deaths from starvation per se, but we had no way of measuring the devastation and loss associated with lack of food for those affected by HIV.

Our assessment tools were developed by all the UN agencies and NGO partners. All assessment missions were joint missions as well. These assessments formed the frameworks for all resourcing requests.

Food assistance was essential for millions of beneficiaries, including HIV-infected people. Local communities were very involved in the decision-making to ensure buy-in and facilitated distribution of assistance. Women were a vital part of food distribution operations at the local level. They participated at every level of decision-making that affected their community. We also had a very gender-balanced staff at the regional headquarters level and in the country offices.

We worked very diligently to maintain the standing reputation of WFP from the previous drought ten years earlier. Several countries involved in that drought had already phased out and ceased operations. At the governmental level, we encountered some resistance mixed with cooperation. Due to the GMO nightmare, we faced major challenges in working with several governments. We met regularly with heads of state and more often with cabinet members and ministers. It was a diplomatic minefield!

We had an excellent working relationship with our partners. After the Secretary General asked me to coordinate all the humanitarian actors in the drought operations, we developed a close working relationship at the country and regional levels. We housed all UN agency partners in our Regional Office in Johannesburg. Almost all the NGOs had representation in the Johannesburg area, so they were also able to meet and work closely with us on assessment, sharing of responsibilities in on-going

operations and on coordinating Special Envoy missions. Overall, coordination was one of the best aspects of the operations.

My most memorable experiences during the emergency include: dealing with the murder of one of our national staff in our regional office during office hours; dealing with the GMO disinformation, misinformation and false information surrounding the issue with governments; managing massive logistics challenges; the success with our sourcing of food and non-food items for our operations; and flying from Tokyo over the North Pole in order to get to Geneva (to participate in a major donor summit for the Southern Africa operations) “the day before I left Tokyo;” and working with the pioneers of linking nutritional support to the HIV fight.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with the WFP?**

I was fortunate to have worked closely with the then new Executive Director, Catherine Bertini, as she led the organization in a new management direction and forged a new approach to humanitarian response and empowering women. Working at WFP remains one of the most important and meaningful experiences of my professional life.

### **What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

I always tell young people to be sure that they understand what WFP does and understand where WFP has operations. I also stress that working for WFP is very rewarding, but the sacrifices are great.



## Marina Raïs

Head of Sub-Office (2002-2005)  
Programme Officer (2000-2002)  
Project Officer (1996-2000)  
Assistant Project Officer (1993-1996)



*WFP Registration, WFP/Michael Huggins*

### Readiness For Hard Work

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in 1993 and was posted to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. During the Southern African drought (2002/2003), I was stationed in Gweru, Midlands Province of Zimbabwe. I recall an extremely tough working period. We would start work at 8:00 and finish at 20:00 when we went for dinner. We did, however, get an hour of lunch break. After four months like this, we decided that our efficiency was becoming compromised, apart from the fact that we were increasing our vulnerability to disease. Therefore, we decided to reduce our work on Sundays to four hours, rather than eleven.

I was head of our sub-office in a four-year assignment. Gweru was the smallest WFP sub-office in Zimbabwe. I opened the sub-office, recruiting 13 general staff members, some of whom are still with WFP. With the start of the second Iraq

war, funds were diverted, and after seven and a half months, I was told to close the sub-office. I was transferred to southern Madagascar.

People in Zimbabwe were experiencing a terrible drought with multiple causes. Their most immediate need was food. But they had a myriad of other needs as well, from agricultural inputs and tools to know-how, and of course, income. We had a monthly turnover of up to 8,000 mt of food for up to 765,000 poor Zimbabweans. The monthly food cost was approximately USD 2 million, with an additional USD 310,000 in transport and other overhead costs.

Affected communities were largely recipients of food, even though some community members assisted with the distribution, as organized by our partner NGOs. Women were, as much as possible, direct recipients of food aid. They also accompanied malnourished children to the health

centers. Given the magnitude of the drought, WFP food assistance was invaluable, and greatly appreciated.

I remember our cooperation with the government to have been good. They occasionally tried to get favors for some of their friends, but were convinced of other urgencies if arguments were put to them with logic and conviction. For example, in one meeting, they claimed food aid for what is known as “small-scale farmers” in Zimbabwe. These are Zimbabweans who received 30 to 50 acres of land from the colonials, being small-scale as compared to white landowners. When I argued that many farmers owned only one or two acres of land and no inputs or tools, I convinced them that the Zimbabwean “small-scale farmers” could not be recipients of food aid.

Our cooperating partners were one international NGO (CONCERN) and one local one (Lutheran Development Services). Cooperation with both was excellent. The local NGO benefitted from both WFP and CONCERN, learning the work well. We went on monitoring trips together and our relationships were very cordial.

When I arrived, I was given an office at the back of the garden of the hotel that I stayed in. The garden was probably 100 meters long. I did not have any phones. Harare would call me often, which meant that a hotel staff would call me from across the garden, and I had to get up and cross it in order to get to the phone. Receiving phone calls was a major and complex enterprise. I had a

normal chair, so I realized how much a chair with wheels facilitates work at a desk.

After a couple of months, I found a house that we could use as our office. With the P2, we bought furniture, interviewed for 13 posts, and set up our offices.

After four months in the hotel, I moved into a house down the road. This was supposed to be a four-year assignment. After another two and a half months, I was told that I would be leaving within the next four weeks. I hadn't had time yet to unpack many of my belongings from the container. I wished I had stayed in the hotel and never opened my container, which now had to be done again. With Zimbabwe in disarray, my new container arrived in Madagascar after five months.

I remember it being extreme hard work with hardly any breathing space. I remember feeling exhausted all the time

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with the WFP?**

I have known WFP since the mid-80s when I lived in Benin. I have immense admiration for Catherine Bertini, who, in my view, turned the organization around, made it efficient, and put it intellectually at the forefront, with regard to Results-Based Management (RBM) and gender issues. WFP's work improved exponentially under Bertini, and it actually delivered and did what it was supposed to do. To illustrate this point, when I moved to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the

United Nations (FAO) in 2008, people there still had little understanding of RBM. So, upon request from some colleagues, I offered a course on RBM for three of them, for five afternoons in the summer of 2009.

As an Alumna, I had the privilege to be briefed in July 2016 about the current structural reform, WFP Integrated Roadmap, which includes a new Strategic Plan and a Financial Framework. I think that this is another watershed development, which if implemented as planned, will no doubt contribute significantly to reducing the problem of hunger and extreme poverty in the world.

There was, and unfortunately still is, a problem in WFP; i.e. the rough style of work that prevails. Two of my friends, both professionals with

WFP for 15 to 25 years, are trying to find secondments at FAO, because they find the harsh working environment at WFP too taxing. Even though my current job at FAO is slightly less interesting than what I did at WFP, I have to admit that the general civility of my colleagues is keeping me happy.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

Be ready to work hard. You will learn a huge amount, you will be gratified, and you will have the privilege of meeting many interesting people, from beneficiaries to rural schoolteachers, health staff, district and ministry employees, colleagues in other UN agencies, bilateral aid organizations and NGOs. You will have a truly rich experience.





## Thomas Yanga

Deputy Regional Director, Johannesburg, South Africa (2004-2008)  
Program Officer (1996-1998)



*Thomas Yanga, WFP/Rein Skullerud*

### **Working In a Protracted Crisis**

I joined the World Food Programme (WFP) in January 1996. I was hired as Programme Officer in Mali. I was based in Johannesburg, South Africa, from November 2004 to July 2008.

The 2002 drought affected eight to ten million people throughout the entire Southern African region and WFP's response covered six countries, namely: Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Like previous droughts, its impact lasted more than a year. This drought marked the end of a 10-year cycle that prevailed in that region for many years. With the impacts of Climate

Change, it moved from a ten-year cycle to a two-three year period.

The 2002 drought response was compounded by the high impact of HIV/AIDS and the resultant reduced response capacity of communities and governments, which led to what was described as a "Triple Threat." Hence, the response had to consider all these dimensions.

Following the regional emergency response operation (EMOP) for the first two years, WFP responded with a Regional Protracted Relief Operation (PRRO) for the same six most affected countries. The PRRO

was managed by a Regional Bureau based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

In my capacity as Deputy Regional Director, and under the overall leadership and guidance of the Regional Director, I was the chair of the Management Committee in charge of the operational management of the PRRO. The committee had the function of coordinating WFP response in the areas of assessment, food procurement, logistics, fundraising and resource allocation in the affected countries.

As I mentioned earlier, it was a multi-dimensional crisis, with a combination of the effects of the drought, HIV/AIDS, capacity, and, I would add, poverty. Hence, the response had to take into consideration the impact of all the above on the affected population. The main features of WFP response covered the following interventions in response to the assessed needs of the affected population: food insecurity, nutrition, support to people affected by HIV/AIDS, and building government capacity. The assessment tools used in this regard were: joint annual WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) assessment missions, Regional and National Vulnerability Assessment Committees (RVAC and NVAC), Vulnerability Assessment and Mapping (VAM), and to track program performance, the Community and Households Surveillance (CHS).

The food needs of the beneficiaries were relatively well met as CHS results confirmed throughout the response period. CHS was a survey that captured the impact of food aid on the affected population as compared to those who did not receive any food assistance, and the results constantly showed the positive impact that food aid had on beneficiaries. The surveillance also helped improve targeting efficiency, ensuring that the most vulnerable communities and households were WFP aid recipients. As mentioned above, we were facing a triple threat emergency in which food assistance was just one component. However, I would say that the delivery by WFP and NGOs of the food component was not only critical (its non-availability and access could have caused irreparable damages) but also effective.

The affected communities were involved throughout the whole process, from the needs assessment stage to the delivery and assessment of the impact of the assistance received. Women had a critical and central role in the response to the emergency in many regards, including (i), they were, together with children, the most affected by the food and nutrition insecurity and HIV/AIDS. And (ii), their roles in food production and cooking of available food for the families. Women were also sources of information for the assessments and surveys. As much as possible, food assistance was delivered to them for their respective households and they headed distribution committees.

WFP worked very closely with concerned governments. Our assistance was in support of government interventions. In Zimbabwe (for political reasons) we encountered some challenges working with the government, especially on the issue of the assessed needs.

In my view, the UN agencies involved worked very well with their respective NGO partners, but there were many challenges for the UN agencies to work together, especially at the beginning of the crisis in 2002. The magnitude of the crisis required a very well coordinated and complementary response from the UN agencies and governments concerned. An evaluation of the UN response to the crisis, conducted by the Boston Consulting Group in 2004, found that the response of UN agencies was compounded by the following issues: inadequate coordination, inadequate capacity at country level, and the lack of accountability from UN managers (Resident Representatives) at country level. That assessment led the UN to create the Regional Directors Team, which built on the informal, effective and efficient, model of coordination called Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Support Office (RIACSO), and put in place at the regional level by WFP, UNAIDS, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Other UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

and the World Health Organization (WHO) joined later.

The Regional Directors Team was very effective at the beginning of its functions in getting UN agencies to deliver "As One." The Regional Directors Team was later transformed into a Regional United Nations Development Group (UNDG), but since its leadership was taken over by UNDP, it has become another UN bureaucratic, supposedly coordination mechanism.

The Regional PRRO was approved by the WFP Board in 2004. It recognized for the first time, the important role of food in addressing the scourge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, as well as the important role of WFP in that fight. Until then, throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, WFP was assisting people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS without ever using the word "HIV" or "AIDS." The politically correct phrase was "assistance to people affected by chronic diseases."

When the first anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs were available to people infected with HIV, the nutrition requirement to support the negative effects of those drugs made food as critical for the patients, if not more, as the drug itself, to the point that in parts of the Southern African region, many people conditioned the acceptance of the "savior" drugs on the provision of WFP's nutritious food.

The regional approach used by WFP had many advantages, but also a number of challenges, especially on the financial management aspect

that led to the biggest fraud (over USD 6 million) that the organization has ever witnessed.

The multidimensional aspect of the drought emergency also required a very good, coordinated response from UN agencies. Unfortunately, it worked as long as the coordination mechanism was more or less informal. When it was formalized, it became more bureaucratic than effective.

However, the grouping of all UN Regional Offices in one physical location (Sunninghill, Johannesburg, South Africa) encouraged interaction and collaboration among the various agencies involved in the response to the crisis.

As the emergency became protracted, there was increasing pressure from some donors such as the UK Department of International Development (DFID) to look at different response modalities such as the use of cash transfers instead of commodity handouts to beneficiaries. This pressure led to the consideration and adoption of the modality, which is now increasingly used in response to humanitarian situations.

Also, in a protracted crisis situation, the distinction between humanitarian and reconstruction becomes a challenge, especially when key donors supporting the response efforts have separate funding windows for humanitarian and development interventions.

The situation in Zimbabwe was compounded by a political and

financial crisis (which led to an inflation rate of over 2 million percent on a yearly basis), and the UN and NGOs in the region prepared contingency plans to deal with the consequences of such a situation. The Zimbabwe UN Country Team could not agree on the assumptions, especially on the population movement. All the representatives from donor countries were of the view that closed to half of the population will leave the country and move to neighboring ones, mainly South Africa, and the other representatives held the contrary view that population movement would be marginal. The latter were right.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with the WFP?**

I will mention three significant management transformations that positively changed the way WFP works. The first was the institutionalization of the Advance Financing Mechanism by which, while using the same resources and donors continuing to provide resources to WFP the same way, yielded an increase of over 10 percent more beneficiaries covered. The second "revolution" occurred in 2008 when WFP moved strategically from food aid to food assistance, with an expanded toolkit, including cash transfers, to respond to crisis. The third "revolution" took place toward the end of my term with WFP. It was the consolidation of the various programmatic tools into one called "Country Programme," which will be fully implemented by January 2019. This will at the same time allow for a

more efficient management of WFP country activities and adaptation to changing situations.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

I will tell him or her that WFP is one of the best UN agencies to work for, because it is the largest

humanitarian UN agency. More importantly, it addresses both humanitarian and development challenges in countries where it works. In terms of career development, it allows horizontal, vertical and geographical moves, taking you to some of the most inhospitable places as well as some very welcoming ones.



## James Morris

Executive Director (2002-2007)  
UN Special Envoy (2002-2005)



*James Morris, UN Security Council, WFP/E. Debebe*

### **The Birth of A Partnership Mentality**

I was named Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP). I started in Rome in April 2002. During the Southern African drought emergency that I covered, things were very bad. The HIV issue was overwhelming. The drought had an enormous impact on agricultural production. The impact of these two things together was devastating on civil society and governments. Many children were orphaned and many were hungry. It was an extraordinarily difficult situation.

The UN Secretary General asked me to be his Special Envoy to address these problems, while I was also serving as Executive Director of WFP. There was a huge food need, as well as a need for healthcare and medical care related to HIV. There was a very significant downturn in the local

economy. It had a devastating effect on families. The drought was really overwhelming in terms of its impact on food production. Things were very, very difficult in the six or seven countries I visited.

My role as a UN Envoy was to coordinate all the response to the disaster, to work with governments, to work with other UN agencies, to raise money, to build the staff and organization, and to bring in the Boston Consulting Group (BCG)—brilliant consultants who helped us find a unifying way to do our work. My job was really a leadership role.

WFP had offices in each of the countries and it was very much on top of the weather issues, crop production and yields. WFP was also on top of death rates and the



number of orphans. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), among others, and a good number of NGOs were also involved in these assessments.

I think we did a very good job. We fed a huge number of people. We also did a very good job of bringing UN agencies and NGOs together to work collegially. It was very difficult, so we had to raise a lot of money. And we worked with governments, some more difficult than others, but it worked.

Food assistance was absolutely critical! As I recall, we were feeding 5.5 million people in Zimbabwe—a very significant number of people. Food assistance was also critical to the fight against HIV. Without good nutrition, all the medicine in the world won't work, so WFP was good at delivering food and working in partnerships. I think WFP was very effective, in terms of the way it brought in BCG to help, the way it worked with the other UN agencies, and how it worked very well with NGOs. It was one of the really top WFP performances.

We tried to work in partnership with the governments, and I think most of them understood how serious the problem was, especially for children. WFP was very focused on being a good partner and trying to be helpful.

The role of women was critical to the emergency. When WFP works with women as partners, a better job is

always done. In terms of women's help, they played a critical role in leading the family and local food distributions.

We had a lot of conversations toward encouraging governments to provide leadership. I met with the presidents and leaders of all the affected countries and we worked very closely together. We needed government support because more often than not we distributed food. We also needed government permission for NGOs to do their work. In that regard, I think the UN agencies and NGOs worked together really well, better than they did in many places, because the crisis was so serious. With the HIV issues and the number of lives that were at risk, we knew that we couldn't address HIV without addressing hunger and nutrition.

I also think that the regional and country level coordination with UN agencies during the emergency was better. I don't know how good the regional level coordination was, but the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was a partner. Generally, there was a very good partnership mentality. There was a sense of urgency to address the issue, and I think we did a good and innovative work addressing the HIV issue, working with truck-stops and trucking companies, and getting help toward educating people on the HIV issue. HIV was mostly communicated by truckers driving across Southern Africa, and we worked hard to get the message to people in the trucking business and those who traveled a lot. We tried to make them understand the seriousness of

what they might give to somebody else.

Some of my vivid memories include meetings with heads of states, spending a lot of time in Johannesburg, building a WFP regional presence in Johannesburg to address the issues, and bringing UN agencies and NGOs together. I also met with lots of children who were very sick and children who had lost their parents to HIV/AIDS and would soon become heads of households. I recall spending time with a grandmother who had buried almost her entire family on the plot of land surrounding her house, playing soccer with a little boy who was an orphan, holding a little baby in a hospice and knowing that the baby was going to die shortly, visiting a lot of hospitals where there were overwhelming numbers of HIV patients, and visiting lots of food distribution centers.

The use of BCG as a consultant, with very bright people figuring out how everybody could work together, was really important. I am very proud of what we did there, in terms of understanding that we couldn't address HIV without addressing food and water, and that people who were focused on these issues needed to work together. Remember, this was 10-12 years ago, but I am very proud of our work. We worked very hard and did a good job at raising money. WFP was very good at distributing food. We also had very good private sector support. But at the end of the day, there were still a lot of hungry people and a lot of children died. However, I think we

made good progress toward addressing women's health issues, the issue of mother-child transmission of HIV, and a lot of other progress since my time. I mean, we know how to deal with mother-child transmission now.

There were a number of countries in which the affected people didn't necessarily like the national governments that were in charge, and that was difficult, but we just had to work hard at it everyday, building relationships and confidence.

There is a wonderful man by the name of Tom Lewis who was loaned to WFP from BCG. There were two other tremendous young men who worked for WFP. Rob Opp, who worked for WFP, and Chris Kaye, who worked for OCHA, and was ultimately recruited to work for WFP. The two of them were just outstanding in terms of coordinating and getting the work done.

We had a very unfortunate incident, in that a couple of people in South Africa stole a lot of money from WFP—around USD 6 million. That was a very unhappy circumstance, but a wonderful lady by the name of Debbie Saidy was there and it helped a lot. Rob Opp and Chris Kaye, who was later sent to Myanmar to be our Country Director, were very helpful. We also had a very good working relationship with UNICEF.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with the WFP?**

As a former Envoy, I am grateful that we did a good job. Food

production became better with the weather, we had good partners helping us, we made good progress on HIV, and I think we established a really good partnership mentality.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

WFP is an extraordinary organization. The issues it deals with are so serious, such as addressing child hunger, seeing that children are fed so that they can be successful at school. It is a wonderful place to work and to make a difference in the lives of tens of millions of people. I think WFP has done a really good job

of finding best business practices to bring to the organization. I am proud of the way that world hunger has been reduced over the last 20 years. The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of cutting hunger in half, we did that. But there are very many bright, well-educated, passionate, able, and very good local employees who are not on the international staff. So there is a lot of talent, locally, to work on these issues, and that hasn't always been the case. But you wouldn't find a better place to work for a young person that cares about the world's humanitarian agenda than WFP.

**Josette Sheeran**  
Executive Director (2007-2012)



*Josette Sheeran, WFP/Peter Smerdon*

**Serving With the Navy Seals  
Of the Humanitarian World**

When I first discussed becoming Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, neither of us could have predicted that the world would soon be hit with what I called “the perfect storm”—food, finance and fuel crises, coupled with natural disasters and conflicts. I became Executive Director of WFP in April 2007. Within months, the perfect storm began unfolding, triggering the doubling of food prices and sweeping through virtually every country. It dropped an additional 140 million to the ranks of the world’s hungry, getting us near the 1

billion mark. There were other storms afoot—including a severe El Niño induced drought devastating the livelihoods and lives of farmers and herders throughout Southern Africa. Crop production in many nations, such as Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Botswana was nearly cut in half as the cost to import food was doubling. We needed to quickly rally the world to stand with the world’s most vulnerable people and nations. It was also clear that long-term solutions were urgently needed to deal with the ever increasing climate-related emergencies, which

had increased manifold over past decades. I realized then and there that we needed to build resiliency into our emergency work. My question was, how do we empower local communities and governments to cope with the cycle and pattern of droughts and floods that disable farmers, food and nutrition systems so dramatically?

Regarding the drought in Southern Africa, my first core responsibility as Executive Director was to work with WFP teams, Board and governments to ensure that we had a strategy and effective response to this massive disaster. This required not only an action plan but also igniting global awareness and attention to this drought, which was competing for resources with the food and financial crises. My second critical role was fundraising, because at WFP we must fundraise by emergency and help the world prioritize, as there are always competing global emergencies. My third role was working with WFP's amazing Assessment and Operations teams to ensure we were mounting an effective response not only at our headquarters in Rome, but also at our Southern Africa regional office in Johannesburg, South Africa. Food assistance is vital during that kind of emergency, not only to prevent stunting and save lives, but also to preserve crops and livestock that could get completely used up, potentially throwing people decades backward in their ability to care for their families.

WFP's Household Vulnerability Assessments set the standard for targeting those most in need. Our

joint crop assessments with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) determine the level of food availability. These assessments are utilized not only for our operations but also by governments, the UN and NGOs. This was my first drought emergency and I was proud of the work being done. It was a great service to the broader UN humanitarian response coordinated by OCHA and to the world.

My first drought in Southern Africa was before the game-changing Lancet series, which presented widespread evidence that the first 1000 days of a child's life were the most critical to preventing the most devastating effects of malnutrition. I was asked to write the introduction of this work in Lancet and I remember the moment I realized that a child's body and brain would be damaged beyond recovery in those early years. At that time, we weren't targeting young and vulnerable, pregnant and lactating women, as tightly as we eventually would, based on this scientific evidence. I called this the "burden of knowledge" and rallied WFP and the world to prioritize reaching children in the first 1000 days and developing effective high-density nutritional food for them in emergencies. We were soon producing Wawa Mum, which combined the micronutrients in chickpea and dried milk to protect a child's brain and body. This was a game-changer.

We were able to mitigate some of the effects of the drought such as severe malnutrition and starvation.

What we were not able to solve was the ability of communities to become fully resilient, to rebuild their livelihoods, and to effectively ensure that beneficiaries are able to restart their lives at the end of the drought. We worked with the World Bank, the UN agencies and Southern African leaders to explore root causes and more effective responses. There are solutions that were not applied: for example in the USA, California suffers repeated droughts but mitigates the damage through water preservation methods and water-sharing agreements with Colorado. There is a huge amount of water in Southern Africa, but there were very few water-sharing agreements in effect in the region.

I believe the biggest priority in all aid has to be the ability to effectively respond to emergencies where populations are most vulnerable and cannot address their own needs. This could be caused by war, conflict, natural disaster, ineffective or destructive governance. WFP has a well-deserved reputation of being able to mount massive responses, reaching millions of people within weeks in sustained lifesaving operations in the world's most challenging places. This capacity must never be compromised. What we sometimes could do better is leveraging those responses in concert with governments and other actors such as the African Union (AU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), FAO, and the tremendously valuable work by many local and international groups to create a broader resiliency

response. One hugely positive example was that WFP led an effort funded by the Rockefeller Foundation to build a risk insurance program for Africa so that farmers are able to claim insurance payments to rebuild their farms or livestock. The creation of the African Risk Capacity (ARC) under the African Union in Addis Ababa successfully created this first resiliency system for Africa so that WFP's emergency response could be followed by insurance payments to farmers to rebuild their lives.

WFP cannot and does not act alone. When it launches a large-scale emergency response, WFP relies on a number of tools such as coordination with governments and NGOs, village councils and women's councils to guide us in the affected areas and toward setting up distribution systems. We typically hire and build capacity to respond locally, often putting systems in place that could last beyond the emergency. We also work with schools through our school feeding programs to ensure that children do not disrupt their education and are getting some basic nutrition during droughts.

I have found that if you want to tailor your response to a local emergency, bringing community women together can be a powerful tool. Women are usually very close to the problem. They are the ones who typically have to worry about whether children have food, schools are functioning, hospitals have the kind of nutritional support needed, and work continues on farms. More than half of farmers in Southern Africa are women. I learned that an

important key to a successful emergency response is activating the wisdom of women at local and national levels in the hardest hit countries. It is very important to look holistically at the challenge, and women can help do that, given their roles in the lives of families and children in Southern Africa.

During my time, we focused on a number of big innovations. The first was negotiating agreements with key donor nations, allowing us to preposition food—buying food ahead in non-emergency situation. The whole purchasing side of food needed to be changed to make sure that we were not competing during emergencies in markets that would have very little food and sky-high prices. WFP was able to negotiate the ability to preposition based on our decades long assessment of when and where disasters and needs fall. The second was moving WFP's donors to cash donations so that we could purchase food locally, so poor farmers could get the business and be part of the solution. During my tenure, WFP began purchasing over 90 percent of the Grade A East African maize rather than shipping it in from abroad. WFP moved close to 80 percent of its purchases coming from the developing world. In addition to Purchase for Progress, we were able to buy some of our food from farmers that were the hardest hit in war zones or other difficult areas where they were not connected to normal supply chains. If they did not sell to WFP often then they would need food aid to survive. Indeed, over half of the people in the

world who are dependent on food assistance are farmers, and we felt that through local procurement we could help these farmers get off long-term dependence and make them a part of the solution. I never met a farmer who didn't want to solve her/his problem. Farmers want to till the land, get their hands in the dirt, succeed and raise enough food for their families. WFP tried to build the ability of farmers to get off aid and be a part of the solution.

A third innovation was introducing "digital" food aid, using telephones or swipe cards so that people in emergencies could purchase food from local markets. It was very important that we didn't disable local food markets. During my time at WFP, we built the capacity and rolled out this program of cash transfers, helping transform our work from droughts to cyclones to refugee communities. Many of the ideas were born through creative experimentation in WFP country offices, such as Mozambique under the leadership of Lola Castro. WFP has many innovators on the frontlines!

Fourthly, we ensured that we better understood and managed the nutritional content of food, and that it was properly targeted toward the populations in need. These products, like our own Wawa Mum, worked wonders in protecting children in emergencies. It is literally like watering a flower in a desert—children come back to life and can overcome the effects of malnutrition even in the most difficult drought emergency or conflict situation.

We were also able to set up a risk framework for WFP's emergency work, developing a transparent process to evaluate and share risks with our WFP Board before heading into an emergency. This was very important, as WFP operates in the world's most dangerous and challenging environments and cannot bear these risks alone.

Another innovation was using schools as an organizing device to ensure that children stay educated during these emergencies. We found that school feeding wasn't just about a cup of food; it was about attracting children to continue their education during emergencies. If children cannot get food at school or cannot go to school because they have to help the family survive, then you get a second order of crisis in a community. It was therefore very important to connect food aid to schools. We also worked with donors and other UN agencies to ensure access to water so people could get clean water and cook their food, because people cannot eat dry bags of WFP grain or beans. Activating the right toolkit of the above innovations, in combination with WFP's traditional tools, is very important.

When you look at a situation like chronic droughts in Southern Africa, food aid is not the solution; it is a response to a crisis. In my view, governments must take responsibility and get to the root cause of the response problem. Repeatedly being unprepared for a recurrent drought is often a failure of governments. Now, with the

dramatic challenges that the world is facing, we know that many countries are overwhelmed, and land areas that used to support large populations are not able to support them any longer because of changes in climate. If you look at Southern Africa, there are many amazing water systems that cross borders and boundaries, but it is one of the areas in the world that have the least amount of agreements on access to water. In a drought, it becomes very important who gets to draw water from which sources. As Einstein said, the definition of insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." If we don't have water-sharing agreements, for example, we are going to have people without water in every drought. But if we have agreements to share water equitably between the different countries and villages, and people have the tools for water collection, we could eliminate a large portion of the crisis to humanity during these situations.

In terms of working with governments outside the region, we were able to bring in the BRIC countries as major WFP donors and partners. We harnessed the support of Brazil, India, China and Russia for the first time. I felt it was very important to expand the group of nations supporting humanitarian assistance. In addition, we were able to bring many of the Gulf States to support us during the food crisis, including the King of Saudi Arabia who gave us the astounding gift of



USD 500 million to address the food crisis.

WFP also has thousands of partners around the world at NGO level because it realizes that local NGOs or international NGOs such as CARE, Save the Children and the Red Cross are often very good at the last mile. They often work with communities over a long time. In an emergency, when WFP needs to set up a massive supply chain, working with others at the local level is vital. Building local capacity was a big priority of mine. Countries like China now have the capacity to respond to emergencies internally, but that wasn't always the case. WFP had huge programs in China just decades ago.

As far as coordination with other UN agencies, I think it is important that WFP and FAO really coordinate, because it's one thing for farmers to eat and it's another for them to be able to plant the next crops, and if they are not getting seeds in a drought situation, and have no money to buy seeds because they had no crops, they won't be able to feed their families.

I learned a lot about humanity on the front lines of hunger. I was always struck by the fact that starving people usually do not steal food. They are often very dignified and typically the most anxious to solve their own problems. They want to be able to feed themselves and their families. You can have people in emergencies with food at markets and if they don't have money to buy it what can they do? A starving person without access to solutions

has three options: revolt, migrate or die. It struck me very deeply that people are desperately seeking to get out of their emergency situation. It made me honor and respect humanity on the frontlines of these emergencies. People say you shouldn't give a man a fish; you should teach him to fish. And I say, what if that man doesn't own a fishing pole, a string or a hook, or there is no lake to fish in? The farmers I met on the frontlines of droughts and other emergencies are incredibly skilled at getting food to grow with nothing. Their soil and seeds are exhausted; they have no advanced tools or fertilizer. If they have a teaspoon of water, they will make something grow out of it. They don't have fancy machines and other supplies; they have to make food grow almost as a miracle. It is a responsibility of governments, in particular, and all of us to try to find a solution to the fact that many people in the world are simply without the tools to solve their own problems of poverty and hunger.

I was also struck when I went to the Famine Museum in Ireland and saw a quote by a British official during the time of the Great Famine more than 150 years ago that said, "if these people in Ireland weren't so lazy, they wouldn't be starving." But if you actually look at the root of starvation in Ireland, when my farming ancestors fled from starvation there, they did not have the ability to solve their own problem. They weren't lazy; they were denied the ability to till the land. They didn't own the land; they didn't have the right to

the land; they didn't have the right to take loans and buy seeds, so when crops failed they lost everything, and they were kicked off the land and were starving. Yet the attitude was that they must be lazy. My starkest memory from the frontlines of hunger is that they are not lazy people. These are people who are desperate to solve their own problems and they are often in the most dysfunctional environments, and they are not getting support from any quarter to solve their problems. I think this is one of the root causes of the migration problem we have in the world. Most people don't want to leave their ancestral homes, but if they can't even make sure that there is food to feed their child, they would do anything to do so.

### **What are your general reflections on your time and work with the WFP?**

I remember meeting some of the most amazing people I have ever encountered. Some of the most willing-to-work, generous people, sharing what little food they had (wanting to make sure I had enough food), and people without options. It motivated me to devote my life to helping find long-term solutions to these challenges.

I also remember benefiting from the power of women to help you see solutions that you otherwise won't see. I remember in Cameroon, we were trying to erect the first community food banks—a shared village warehouse where farmers could store their food to draw down during the rainy season. No one

trusted handing over their precious food to a community warehouse. WFP consulted with women who suggested a solution: put three locks on each warehouse and each village elected three people to keep the keys. It was brilliant: in order to open the warehouse, all three had to be present. This unlocked the capacity to create a food bank in that area, and once farmers were able to store food properly, they were able to accumulate food savings, so they didn't need food aid. I learned that we often over-think solutions. There is a lot of wisdom at the local level to solve these problems and we have to be careful to listen because sometimes we miss an obvious solution.

Another major transformation we went through was a shift from food aid to food assistance. There was an era when food aid was a handout; we focused on transforming it into a hand-up. The question was, how to use food assistance to lift the population from surviving to thriving?

Serving with WFP is an honor and privilege. I refer to WFP as the Navy Seals of the humanitarian world. These are the best, brightest, bravest and most dedicated people I have ever worked with. I have never been moved by humanity like I was in places people would consider the grimmest and most hopeless. I found people in these situations that still believed they could make their lives better. WFP has been able to earn a lot of respect and trust from vulnerable populations, the donor community and the world. This is

very important because you can't help people without earning support.

**What would you recommend to a young man or woman thinking of a career with WFP?**

People come to see me regularly, asking about how they can make a difference in the world, and I use WFP as prime example. Working with WFP offers some of the most meaningful experiences that people could give and get in return. Hunger

is a shared human experience. I don't think there is anyone whose family has not experienced hunger in either his/her generation or parents or grandparent's generation. Hunger is a common cause. It is something that should be resolved in this generation. It is the world's most solvable problem—we know how to feed the world, and there is enough food for everyone, so now is the time for people to come onboard.

## **Epilogue**

### **Recommendations**

Our contributors have offered their experiences and reflected on their times with the World Food Programme (WFP) during the Southern African drought emergencies, but by all means, many of those whose stories you have read spent considerable time with WFP in various other capacities. Their overall services with WFP is one of the reasons we asked them to provide recommendations for the next generation of WFP employees or those interested in joining other UN agencies.

These recommendations should serve those who hire individuals and those interested in a career with WFP. For instance, Jim Morris recommends that WFP should apply more efforts toward including local talents on the international staff, which could diversify operational ideas.

The experiences of these individuals make them reliable authorities when it comes to the skills needed to improve the services WFP provides. Below are some of the recommendations we have drawn from these contributions:

#### **Core Knowledge**

Michele Mercaldo has suggested that, in addition to their professional studies, future candidates for a job with WFP must possess a certain level of knowledge in basic subjects such as grammar, arithmetic, geometry, music, etc., in order to prevent a debilitating reliance on the Internet. Others have also recommended previous experience outside the UN system, preferably in the business sector.

#### **Multiple Hats**

Candidates interested in working with WFP should be skilful and versatile. Service with WFP will often require individuals to assume multiple roles, sometimes outside the scope of their formal education. Preparedness for new tasks is a necessary trait.

#### **Openness to Frontline Service**

While headquarters offers comfort and luxury in contrast to certain field locations, candidates should be open to or welcome field placement. Some contributors have suggested that WFP should make prior international field experience, even if as an intern, volunteer or an NGO worker, a high recruitment criterion. Rotation between headquarters and field duties is valuable for all employees.

A future candidate must understand that most WFP field offices are located in non-family duty stations. Because WFP addresses humanitarian and development challenges, the organization takes employees to some of the most rugged and inhospitable places around the world, but also to equally welcoming places that some never want to leave. In this regard, candidates

should be prepared to work in conflict and other politically complex situations.

### **Diversity and Tolerance**

WFP is a diverse organization, institutionally and in terms of the places and people it serves. Therefore, intercultural competence, resilience, compassion, openness to change, and willingness to work with different cultures should be required traits for a young person interested in a career with WFP.

### **Innovation**

WFP is what Owen Calvert has described as “an innovative organization that gets things done.” Josette Sheeran appropriately refers to WFP as the “Navy Seals” of the humanitarian world. According to Jim Morris, WFP is the best place for any young person looking for an organization that is most interested in the world’s humanitarian agenda. To uphold this reputation, those interested in working with WFP must be innovative, hardworking, honest, selfless, and ready to make sacrifices.

### **Understanding WFP**

This may seem obvious, but a clear understanding of WFP’s work and areas of operation as distinct from other UN agencies is vital to succeeding at the organization. WFP is an agency with a unique stature among its peers. A place to start would be its relationship with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the UN.

### **Knowledge of Food Security**

An understanding of local food security and nutrition issues is pertinent to WFP work. WFP is proud of its comparative advantage in “building resilience for food security and nutrition.”

### **Humility**

One may possess the finest academic training and not succeed at WFP because sometimes actual events do not correspond to theoretical understanding of the issues. Arnt Breivik has suggested enthusiasm and a willingness to learn from those above or below one’s rank. It is also important not to always assume that your knowledge of an event is greater than those who experienced it.

### **Interagency Mobility**

It has been suggested that those interested in long-term humanitarian service should consider working with multiple UN agencies. Jean-Jacques Graisse recommends starting with WFP because he believes that other UN agencies could benefit from the formidable experience and expertise that WFP offers its employees.

In conclusion, our contributors have offered various recommendations on how to acquire an enriching experience at an organization in which mobility may not “necessarily be marked by meritocracy.” One must possess what Piero Terranera refers to as a drive akin to a vocation or love for humanity. It is also emphatically important to always stick to the humanitarian principle of neutrality by selecting beneficiaries without discrimination.

Moreover, communication can often become complex in a multinational organization. It is therefore important to talk to one’s colleagues in order to prevent some of the nuances that may complicate written communication in a diverse organization.

Ultimately, as Catherine Bertini put it, if you want to be a part of something bigger than yourself, have a rewarding experience and adventure, go to sleep knowing that you helped someone survive, and become a permanent member of a global family working to end hunger, join WFP.

**Joseph Kaifala, Editor**



**Editorial Panel**



Dr. Suresh Sharma, Chair



Gretchen Bloom, Member



Georgia Shaver, Member



Angela Van Rynbach, Member

**The World Food Programme Alumni Network**  
<https://wfpalumni.wfp.org>

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