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Summary of the work of the 2021 annual session of the Executive Board

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Draft summary of the work of the 2021 annual session of the Executive Board

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Current and future strategic issues

2021/EB.A/1 Opening remarks by the Executive Director

1. The Executive Director welcomed Board members and observers to what he hoped would be the last Board session to be held virtually. Summarizing the global situation he warned that, while the international response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020 had helped to avert mass famine, destabilization and migration, the outlook for 2021 was devastating owing to the persistence of the pandemic along with climate change and conflict. Many of the 47 documents to be presented during the session were aimed at helping WFP to be ever more strategic, accountable and effective in addressing those challenges.
2. Topics that were likely to be returned to frequently throughout the Board's discussions included the United Nations food systems summit and the global school meals coalition, which would be launched during the summit with the aim of ensuring that by 2030 all children in school around the world received nutritious school meals. WFP's efforts to improve its workplace culture was another major theme. A recent global staff survey had attracted responses from 84 percent of WFP's global workforce – 16,653 people – 92 percent of whom reported being proud to work for WFP. Improvements had also been recorded in staff perceptions of team collaboration and leadership and of management support for career development and in staff suggestions for improved ways of working. Gender parity had also been advanced, with women currently accounting for 46 percent of international positions and 38 percent of national ones.
3. Turning to the global situation, the Executive Director noted that the pandemic had increased the number of people in phases 3, 4 or 5 of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) to 270 million, of whom 41 million were in phase 4 and 580,000 in phase 5. The cost of reaching those people alone was USD 6 billion. Areas of particular concern included the Syrian Arab Republic, where 12 million people were in IPC phases 3, 4 or 5, and Madagascar, where a combination of repeated drought and the pandemic had set back progress, leading to famine conditions and demonstrating how poor countries were paying the price of the climate change to which wealthier nations had contributed the most. The number of people in IPC phases 3, 4 and 5 had also increased in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, Yemen, Ethiopia, the Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria and Burkina Faso, and the situation was likely to get even worse, including with the imminent return of the hurricane and cyclone season.
4. The previous week the Executive Director had spoken at the United Nations Security Council's special session on the conflict in the Tigray region of Ethiopia. More than 4 million people in the region were estimated to be in IPC phases 3, 4 and 5, indicating a clear need for immediate action. Following the Executive Director's advocacy, the Prime Minister had granted humanitarian access to the region, and WFP was currently in extensive discussions with the military authorities on remaining issues. Progress had been made in obtaining visas and on satellite phones, and WFP hoped to have greater access to Tigray in the following days. That would enable WFP, working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other partners, to increase the number of people reached from 1.3 million to 1.6 million by the end of June and to 2.1 million in July. Ninety percent of the 2020 harvest and 80–90 percent of the livestock in the area had been lost at the outset of the conflict, creating problems for the current planting season and the risk of further increases in hunger and malnutrition.
5. In closing the Executive Director outlined the funding situation for 2021. So far WFP had received only 26 percent of the USD 15.3 billion it required for 2021, and it expected to raise a total of USD 8.5 billion by the end of the year, compared with USD 8.9 billion in 2020. The Executive Director was asking donors to increase 2021 income to USD 12 billion, but budget shortfalls were forcing ration cuts in many places, with devastating effects for the 139 million people whom WFP planned to reach. Only with donor support could WFP continue to be the best

- of the best, and the Executive Director urged the international community not to underestimate the problems faced.
6. With many of WFP's traditional donors facing the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, members praised the Executive Director's successful fundraising efforts, observing that the record contributions raised in 2020 demonstrated the international community's confidence in WFP. The organization's innovative approach to resource mobilization and expansion of the donor base was to be commended, but several members noted with concern that the share of flexible, unearmarked contributions had not increased, and they urged donors to provide flexible multi-year funding in accordance with commitments made under the Grand Bargain and the Funding Compact. Given the Executive Director's warnings of imminent famine it was also essential that donors increase their overall contributions.
 7. Members applauded WFP's performance in reaching a record number of beneficiaries despite great operational difficulties. In particular they commended WFP's commitment to agile and flexible programming in collaboration with governments and United Nations and other partners; enhanced engagement in tackling the root causes of, and building resilience with regard to, food insecurity and emergencies; alignment with the ongoing repositioning of the United Nations development system; and leadership of the food security, logistics and emergency telecommunications clusters. Many members outlined their governments' contributions to national and international food security, social protection and other humanitarian and development initiatives, including through collaboration on WFP programmes in their own and other countries.
 8. Some members encouraged management to maintain its focus on WFP's core mandate, and many expressed support for the organization's growing engagement at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. WFP's receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2020 reflected recognition of WFP as an important partner in conflict settings and of food assistance as a key factor in mitigating and preventing conflict, including through programmes that linked life-saving emergency response to activities aimed at building community resilience and addressing the root causes of hunger. Members applauded WFP's commitment to advancing humanitarian principles in complex conflict situations and ensuring the impartiality, responsiveness and effectiveness of its actions. International recognition of this commitment facilitated WFP's role at the nexus and was instrumental to the organization's successful negotiation of humanitarian access when conflict or other causes created access challenges, such as in the Tigray region of Ethiopia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.
 9. Members observed that as well as causing severe economic and social damage in both host and donor countries the pandemic had exposed weaknesses in global systems and structures and demonstrated the need for humanitarian actors to follow coordinated collective approaches in partnership with governments. The ongoing formulation of a new WFP strategic plan for 2022-2026 provided an opportunity for building on those lessons, and members looked forward to receiving a first draft of the plan in July prior to contributing to its development over the following months.
 10. Members recommended that the new strategic plan reflect and articulate WFP's role and comparative advantages in addressing existing humanitarian needs while working to reduce needs in the future, with clear priorities for increased engagement at the humanitarian-development-peace nexus based on evidence of impact. That would require enhanced partnerships, including with local actors and the other Rome-based agencies, with clear divisions of work and criteria for partners' involvement, especially in resilience building, climate action, social protection and sustaining peace.

11. Affected people and local communities and institutions should be consulted during the design of programmes in order to ensure alignment with local priorities. This was particularly the case for work on resilience building, which would be central to much of WFP's work and should include income-generating activities and local procurement measures. Members welcomed WFP's work in preparedness and anticipatory action and in identifying risks to food security, including in middle-income countries subject to frequent natural disasters and climate change effects, such as in Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. The plan should also include provisions for continued strengthening of national capacity; full implementation of WFP's protection and accountability policy; the advancement of gender equality and women's empowerment and addressing sex- and gender-based violence; and the full inclusion of people with disabilities as agents, leaders and beneficiaries in WFP programmes.
12. Members looked forward to their forthcoming discussions on preparations for the United Nations food systems summit and the launch of the global school feeding coalition, on the people policy and related issues, and the development of multilingualism at WFP and in the United Nations system. They welcomed the recently appointed Inspector General. Expressing concern about increasing food insecurity caused by the pandemic, climate change and conflict, they reiterated their commitment to continuing to support WFP and the international community in tackling those issues and advancing towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.
13. The Executive Director thanked Board members for their financial and other support, including in holding WFP accountable for maintaining its leading role in the international humanitarian community, and he reiterated his commitment to ensuring that WFP was best prepared for whatever came its way.

Special guests

14. Under the agenda item, the Board heard remarks from two special guests, Ms Amina J. Mohammed, the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Ms Agnes Kalibata, the Secretary-General's special envoy for the United Nations food systems summit to be held in 2021.
15. In a video address, the Deputy Secretary-General thanked Board members for their engagement in the preparations for the food systems summit, which she described as a valuable opportunity to catalyse action to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. She said that WFP and the other Rome-based agencies would play a central role in following up on the outcomes of the summit.
16. The special envoy for the food systems summit mapped out the consultative process through which input at the country, regional and global levels was being gathered and fed into the preparations for the summit, highlighting the inclusion of non-state organizations, communities, young people and food producers alongside United Nations Member States. The priorities identified through the process would be used to draw up a statement of action that would be delivered by the Secretary-General at the summit; the thousands of solutions identified through the various action tracks, organized into clusters, would constitute a rich repository for regions, countries and communities to consult in the future as they planned the transformation of their food systems.
17. Speaking on behalf of their lists, Board members voiced strong support for the summit and congratulated WFP and the other Rome-based agencies for their work on the preparations for the event.
18. Board members said the summit was an opportunity for comprehensive, constructive discussions on the entire range of agriculture and food system issues. They called for an inclusive,

transparent and participatory approach to the preparations and the use of mutually agreed concepts related to the SDGs and the Decade of Action, with a focus on building consensus and avoiding duplication of the work of other United Nations bodies.

19. They described Member States as crucial to operationalizing solutions that ensured food systems contributed to the achievement of the SDGs and called for them to be given the opportunity to consider the summit outcomes through the Rome-based agency governing bodies.
20. Board members asked for more information on the participation of non-state actors in the summit; the mechanisms by which solutions and coalitions would be selected to be showcased at the summit; and the follow-up to and governance in respect of the summit outcomes. They supported holding in-person events, including on national dialogues, as part of the pre-summit and sought clarification of the format for ministerial-level events.
21. Welcoming the formation of the school meals coalition, Board members urged the Deputy Secretary-General to continue work with Member States to ensure its successful launch at the summit. They asked that it be given prominence at the pre-summit ministerial meeting, in the Secretary-General's statement of action for the summit and through a side event at the summit.
22. The special envoy explained that non-state actors could participate in the pre-summit and summit either as part of national delegations or separately; a share of in-person places for the pre-summit had been set aside for civil society and private sector representatives. Regarding the format of the pre-summit, she clarified that all sessions would have virtual and physical participants. Many countries would be engaging virtually but provision had been made for ministers who wished to deliver their statements in person.
23. She noted that areas of convergence were being identified from the action tracks and national and independent dialogues; those that were also aligned with the SDGs would form the basis of the Secretary-General's statement of action. The national dialogues were fostering multisector engagement, opening a channel that she hoped would remain in place after the summit as a means of formulating transformative food system strategies in line with national priorities.
24. Regarding the role of coalitions, she said that they were led by Member States and were aimed at ensuring systemic as opposed to country-level change. She expressed appreciation for the strong support for the school meals coalition, saying that as the summit coalitions had to focus on driving broad change the school meals coalition would need to go beyond the goal of feeding children and demonstrate the potential to deliver transformational change for food systems.
25. In terms of governance and follow-up, she said that food systems belonged to institutions and that the summit sought to inject energy into a process of transformational change implemented by those institutions. The aim was to strengthen their capabilities and encourage them to track their efforts during the Decade of Action to ensure that food systems contributed to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

Other business

2021/EB.A/2 Update on WFP's engagement in the preparations for the 2021 United Nations food systems summit

26. The Director, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, reported that WFP was co-leading two of the three action areas under action track 5 of the forthcoming 2021 United Nations food systems summit and many of the solution clusters, including those on the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, local procurement and crisis and climate risk management. The organization was also co-leading solution clusters under action tracks 1 and 2.

27. Characterizing the summit as a point of departure, the Director said that WFP was already working on how to integrate the outcomes into assessment, analysis and programme design related to the next generation of country strategic plans (CSPs) and the new strategic plan. The food systems aspect of established partnerships would also be strengthened, and the corporate food systems task force would increase internal coordination in that area.
28. Speaking on behalf of his list, one Board member urged WFP to establish as many partnerships as possible in order to optimize the use of limited financial resources. He called for a focus on African needs in the new strategic plan, saying that African countries were the countries most affected by crises. He called on WFP to keep the Board updated on the implementation of the summit outcomes to ensure they matched members' expectations. To that end, his country was organizing a regional dialogue to discuss summit priorities for African countries.
29. One Board member asked WFP to ensure synergies between the food systems summit and the nutrition for growth summit to be held later in 2021. Another Board member observed that the food systems summit would coincide with the development of WFP's new strategic plan and asked how management would ensure that the summit outcomes were integrated into the new plan.
30. One Board member said that unilateral coercive measures should not be taken against developing countries because such measures were detrimental to food security and the creation of resilience and sustainable food systems.
31. The Director welcomed the proposal to organize a regional dialogue for Africa and confirmed that there were strong links between the summit and other global processes, including the nutrition for growth summit and the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Regarding the new strategic plan, a food systems lens had already been applied to the context analysis, theory of change and line of sight; integrating the outcomes would require agility but WFP expected to gain a good understanding of the likely outcomes of the pre-summit event.
32. The deputy to the Secretary-General's special envoy for the food systems summit thanked WFP and its Board for supporting the summit preparations. Follow-up to the summit would be decided at the summit, but the Deputy Secretary-General had consistently said that the Rome-based agencies would play a major role, along with the various coalitions. Implementation of the outcomes would also require a lasting system-wide effort, particularly in terms of the country-led dialogues, which would stretch beyond the timeframe of the summit.

Policy issues

Update on the elaboration of the WFP strategic plan (2022–2026)

33. The Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department, presented an update on the elaboration of the WFP strategic plan for 2022–2026, saying that the consultations on the subject to date had been extensive and welcoming the opportunity to receive further guidance from the Board prior to finalization of a first draft for review in the next month. The two main messages emerging from the elaboration process thus far were that nothing could be achieved without a recognition that people should be at the centre of programme design and operational response at all times and that WFP could do nothing alone and thus must work through partnerships. It was also clear that WFP needed to expand its service provision to governments and partners, leverage complementarities with other actors and attract diversified and flexible multi-year funding.
34. Members expressed appreciation for WFP's ongoing efforts in elaborating the new strategic plan, in particular for the multi-layered consultations, and expressed support for a strong focus on people and partnerships. There was also broad support for a continued mandate of responding

- to emergencies while working to effect socioeconomic transformation. Several members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, said that the strategic plan should be aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with WFP's mandate articulated in terms of SDGs 2 and 17 but also providing for it to contribute to the other SDGs, with clear performance indicators linking to the relevant SDG 2 indicators, including SDG indicator 2.1.2, which utilised the food insecurity experience scale.
35. In relation to the people focus, one member speaking on behalf of a list said that the strategic plan should build on WFP's groundbreaking work with its people policy, disability inclusion roadmap, protection and accountability policy and gender policy by showing how those achievements would shape the organization's operations and give greater emphasis to the centrality of protection. Another member, also speaking on behalf of a list, urged WFP to share the responsibility of devising and implementing local development programmes with the populations it served and to include them in decision making.
 36. In terms of partnerships one member, speaking on behalf of a list, asked that the strategic plan clearly articulate the value added by WFP in each pathway from a systems perspective, including its role in each operational area, its competitive advantages and limits and ways that it could support its partners and its own priorities for its future direction and where it was best situated to lead or play a supporting role, based on clear evidence, lessons learned and a coherent analysis of those considerations. He also urged WFP to strengthen a consortium approach with other United Nations entities and international financial institutions; continue to work within United Nations country teams to achieve greater alignment with United Nations sustainable development cooperation frameworks (UNSDCFs); and enhance joint analysis of risks, needs, vulnerabilities and root causes of country conflicts.
 37. Members also expressed support for a focus on more diversified, flexible and multi-year funding. One member, speaking on behalf of a list, said that the strategic plan should include concrete steps in that regard and advised that providing robust, clear evidence to support adjustments to existing programmes and inform future programming strategy and a value proposition that clearly highlighted WFP's strategic priorities and linked them with adequate resources would increase donors' willingness to increase such funding. Another member, also speaking on behalf of a list, urged WFP to allow for voluntary contributions of national actors, both governments and individuals, in all countries, including low-income countries.
 38. One member, speaking on behalf of a list, asked for a greater focus on support for school feeding programmes and internally displaced persons. Another, also speaking on behalf of a list, called for emphasis on WFP's excellence in humanitarian response and strengthening and mainstreaming anticipatory humanitarian action throughout its emergency operations, as well as a strong commitment to implementing and advocating humanitarian principles. In the light of the Grand Bargain, the strategic plan should reflect the importance of localized support and funding. It should also anchor nutrition integration as a cross-cutting element in the change pathways and articulate WFP's future direction and ambition in the area of nutrition.
 39. The Chief Economist and Director of Research, Assessment and Monitoring echoed comments regarding the need for WFP to stay focused on emergencies, invest in its systems and partner with other United Nations entities, governments, local populations, the private sector and all other actors, including international financial institutions. In his view, in addition to solving problems WFP would in the future often have a significant role to play in matching problems with the people best qualified to solve them. Given the size of the needs, it would also be essential to generate the evidence needed to ensure that funds were used to their fullest potential.
 40. WFP was currently focusing on the strategic results framework, notably to ensure clarity on how resources translated into results and to determine which indicators were most relevant for measuring impact, outcomes and outputs and how to monitor them. It was important to

distinguish between operational indicators and national indicators: data on operational indicators were collected on a frequent basis to track what was being done, what adjustments were needed and whether the desired impact was being achieved, while national indicators showed trends at the national level. WFP was designing indicators to show impact at both levels. It was also working to balance the priorities of the various regions to meet the requirements of different countries in the optimal way with the resources at its disposal.

41. The Assistant Executive Director added that discussion across WFP's functions and at the leadership level was also key to elaborating a strategic plan that was implementable and linked to a strong corporate results framework that demonstrated results and illustrated WFP's work. She confirmed that the first draft of the strategic plan would be produced in early July of 2021, followed by a second draft in September incorporating feedback and then a final draft in time for approval by the Board at its 2021 second regular session, in November.

Other business (continued)

Oral global overview on humanitarian needs and operational concerns and priorities

42. The Deputy Executive Director warned that progress towards achieving zero hunger was being reversed, with 270 million people forecast to be facing or at high risk of acute food insecurity in 2021, an increase of 81 percent from pre-COVID-19 levels; 41 million people across 43 countries were in IPC phases 4 and 5. The countries of highest concern included Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen.
43. Access, resources and political solutions were urgently needed to address massive humanitarian need, which was driven in large part by conflict. WFP planned to reach a record 139 million people in 2021 with a major scale-up of operations. The organization was also increasing its focus on conflict analysis and monitoring, partnerships, early warning and early action and social safety nets.
44. WFP was continuing resilience work with governments in 70 countries in areas including livelihood-related climate change adaptation, shock-responsive social protection systems, post-harvest losses, asset creation and support for smallholder farmers. Progress was also being made on disability inclusion, gender transformative programming and school meals interventions.
45. Internally, WFP was reviewing its systems and processes to ensure 72-hour readiness and capacity to scale up operations anywhere within six months. Management planned to develop a revised emergency activation protocol with an increased focus on the field, which would ensure access to humanitarian, administrative, financial and material resources for emergency response.
46. Despite forecasts of record contributions for 2021, 45 percent of WFP requirements remained unmet. This translated into critical funding shortfalls for operations such as those in Uganda, where it had been necessary to cut rations for 1.2 million refugees to 60 percent since April.
47. Board members expressed great concern at the severity of the global hunger crisis. Several called on the international community to address the root causes of conflict and urged respect for humanitarian law and humanitarian principles at all times.
48. One Board member called on WFP to protect the integrity of the IPC and said that accurate data was vital to that end. She encouraged WFP to mobilize additional funding from traditional and non-traditional sources and to expand the emergency telecommunications cluster. Another member sought more details of WFP's strategy to prepare its staff and operations for more contagious strains of COVID-19 and any lessons learned about prevention and containment in

- low resource, limited access situations. She also asked how WFP planned to protect the food security of populations in IPC 2 to ensure that their status did not worsen.
49. Both members urged WFP to prioritize the protection of beneficiaries from sexual exploitation and abuse and ensure safe access to food and basic services for marginalized groups.
 50. One Board member welcomed the planned scale-up of emergency and resilience building operations in 2021 and encouraged further investment in early warning, early action and anticipatory financing. He welcomed the increase in donor contributions but said that more was needed, adding that WFP should also seek to ensure greater efficiencies and work on prioritizing needs.
 51. One Board member thanked the Board for approving the country strategic plan for his country.
 52. Management reported that for populations in IPC 2 WFP implemented resilience building activities that enabled people to maintain or improve their livelihoods; those activities faced major funding shortfalls, however. WFP prioritized protection and the inclusion of vulnerable groups and was improving monitoring and reporting mechanisms in order to better identify issues. Protection of beneficiary data was also being strengthened, including by the newly recruited data protection officer.
 53. Internal efforts to address the surge in humanitarian needs would be undertaken in accordance with the new strategic plan. The social protection strategy had been updated and progress had been made with the implementation of the private sector fundraising policy; the food systems summit would be a valuable opportunity to engage with the private sector. To improve the funding of climate-related activities, WFP was analysing climate budget lines for a range of donors. The organization was also prioritizing partnerships in the areas of climate and anticipatory action.
 54. WFP was focused on operational continuity in the face of COVID-19, expanding remote monitoring capacity, including through local partners; adapting food distribution protocols and facilities; increasing training on the provision of food assistance during health emergencies; and simplifying workflows.

Asia and the Pacific portfolio

55. The Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific warned that the COVID-19 pandemic continued to ravage the region, where cases had tripled since 1 January 2021. Progress on poverty reduction was being reversed and food insecurity was rising. In the first half of the year WFP had assisted almost 11 million people, including through general food distribution, take-home school rations and livelihood support; work was ongoing with partners in the Pacific on preparations for the region's first food security surveillance system.
56. Emergency operations had been scaled up in Myanmar and Afghanistan, and WFP continued to provide massive support to Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. In Myanmar, the economy and basic social services were on the verge of collapse following a grave escalation of violence. WFP had been assisting over 1 million people, including 330,000 in urban centres, 30,000 newly displaced and 220,000 schoolchildren. Humanitarian access was extremely difficult in several states, where 200,000 people were newly displaced. WFP was advocating immediate access, respect for humanitarian law and an urgent political solution in order to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.
57. In Afghanistan one in three people was food insecure, and 27 of the 34 provinces were experiencing emergency levels of malnutrition. Severe drought had affected food production and conflict was intensifying, with civilian casualties rising by 75 percent in 2020. The humanitarian response faced major challenges from growing insecurity and severe funding shortfalls.

58. Board members commended WFP's work in the region and its partnerships on disaster risk reduction and emergency response. They expressed deep concern over the situation in Myanmar and sought to understand WFP's strategy for reaching populations in need there and in Afghanistan. They asked WFP to prepare for a potential influx of refugees from Afghanistan into neighbouring countries.
59. Board members also requested more information on WFP's work on blended food production in India, contingency planning for banking constraints in Myanmar, progress in disability inclusion and the projected evolution of COVID-19 in the region. One member urged WFP not to overlook efforts to combat chronic food insecurity, childhood malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in Pacific island states.
60. One member called on WFP to continue to advocate access and refugee livelihood assistance in Cox's Bazar; another asked how WFP was balancing existing operations in Myanmar with responding to new emergency needs.
61. Several Board members said there was a continued need for accurate data and improved targeting in conflict-affected areas. Others said that it was important to collect more disaggregated data, particularly with regard to disabilities. One member asked how WFP was responding to evaluation findings and recommendations and requested examples of lessons learned.
62. The Regional Director reported that WFP suboffices were facilitating access in most of Myanmar; the difficulty lay in reaching areas with newly displaced populations, where civil society organizations were doing their best to respond but international actors were unable to gain access. It was unclear whether access challenges were intentional or a result of the chaotic situation, which was also limiting WFP's ability to collect data on affected populations.
63. WFP was negotiating with the Government on the resumption of cash-based transfers, which had been suspended in June; contingency food stocks were in place in case agreement on a solution was not reached. In Cox's Bazar, livelihood support for host and refugee populations continued despite the pandemic; 740 women with disabilities had been included in the activities.
64. In Afghanistan humanitarian actors faced physical rather than administrative access constraints. As conflict intensified, supply routes were cut off and alternatives had to be found, particularly in remote locations. WFP was working on conflict and displacement scenarios for Afghanistan and beyond its borders, together with other United Nations entities and the humanitarian community.
65. COVID-19 vaccinations had begun but coverage was low at 10 to 15 percent of the regional population. Governments had supported the vaccination of WFP staff, around 40 percent of whom were vaccinated.
66. In India, blended food support was linked to an integrated child development services project; WFP was working with local governments to connect women's cooperatives that produced blended food to safety nets in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Odisha states.
67. WFP had strengthened links between evaluation findings and CSP preparation. Notable findings included the conclusion that there was a need for staff experienced in high-level policy and for advocacy to support development-focused programming in small country offices. Valuable insights had also been gained through an evaluation of operations in Afghanistan, which would inform the next CSP for that country.
68. On disability inclusion, WFP was working on data analysis with Trinity College in Dublin and amending its targeting criteria to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities. The regional bureau had begun a dialogue with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on

education and disability and was making changes to its recruitment and office management processes in order to improve inclusiveness.

69. WFP shared Board members' concerns regarding the Pacific island States. Current assessments showed that although food consumption had not declined, households were engaged in high levels of negative coping, particularly in Kiribati, Fiji and Vanuatu.

Eastern Africa portfolio

70. The Regional Director for Eastern Africa described the depth and prevalence of food insecurity in the region as extremely concerning, noting that 20 percent of the global population facing acute food insecurity lived there. Famine was occurring in parts of South Sudan and Ethiopia, and many countries faced high levels of acute and chronic malnutrition. Conflict was the main driver of food insecurity, with conflict response accounting for an estimated 73 percent of all WFP budgets for the region.
71. WFP's refugee response was facing major funding shortfalls; rations had been cut by up to 50 percent for some operations, which was exacerbating the vulnerability of refugees in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda. An additional USD 254 million was needed to maintain operations for the next six months.
72. In Ethiopia an estimated 12.9 million people were in IPC phase 3 or above due to a confluence of shocks including conflict, drought and locust infestations. WFP had grave concerns regarding the situation in Tigray, where 70 percent of the population faced high levels of food insecurity and up to 353,000 people were in IPC phase 5. WFP had pre-empted the United Nations system-wide L3 declaration, mobilizing an equivalent response in March 2021. The organization was reaching 1.2 million people with in-kind assistance and with partners was seeking to extend blanket supplementary support to 1 million women and children. WFP was calling for unimpeded access to Tigray, an immediate ceasefire and contributions of USD 203 million in order to provide basic support until the end of 2021.
73. The Regional Director also gave an update on emergency response in South Sudan, the Sudan and Somalia. He reported that despite the rising humanitarian caseload, WFP was continuing to implement its "changing lives" agenda through mechanisms such as school feeding support, nutrition programming and capacity building in Burundi; technical guidance on refugee assistance in Rwanda; and cash-based transfers for the refugee response in Uganda.
74. Many Board members expressed grave concern about the situation in Tigray, calling for an immediate ceasefire and full humanitarian access, with one also saying that sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated during the conflict constituted a protection crisis that must also be addressed urgently by the international community.
75. One Board member called on WFP to strengthen resilience in East Africa by working across all dimensions of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus in its emergency and development interventions, particularly in its response to growing multidimensional vulnerability in the Sudan. Another asked how WFP was addressing social protection in collaboration with governments; she also asked about WFP's decision to repair dykes in South Sudan, asking whether other actors could have carried out the work.
76. One Board member asked how WFP planned to expand its donor base and overcome gaps to ensure that assistance was provided in the most vulnerable locations. He voiced concern regarding a recent decision of the Government of Kenya to close the Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps and urged WFP to maintain its provision of life-saving food assistance to camp residents, including after closure of the camp, warning that a reduction in food assistance could be perceived as an effort to push refugees back to their countries of origin. He also asked for regular updates on efforts to streamline coordination and implementation of the Sudan family

- support programme and urged WFP to continue its advocacy with the Government of the Sudan to address security, access and protection challenges.
77. One Board member thanked WFP and its partners for their support for humanitarian assistance in Tigray and gave an overview of government efforts to support the humanitarian response in the area. Another commended WFP for its work on school feeding in her country, adding that continued support was needed for refugee response and to support government efforts to develop sustainable agriculture and accessible markets.
 78. The Regional Director reported that an end to the conflict was required to allow for an expansion of humanitarian activities in Tigray. He noted that a collective effort was required, with humanitarian actors working with the Government in particular to find sustained solutions to access challenges.
 79. WFP was working with governments on social protection in Somalia and the Sudan; discussions were ongoing in Kenya and Burundi. WFP was investing heavily in this area and had developed a social protection learning facility in conjunction with academics.
 80. He assured the Board that WFP was striving to broaden its donor base for the region. Regular updates on the Sudan family support programme were being provided bilaterally. He echoed concerns related to the closure of the refugee camps in Kenya and emphasized that WFP did not want a reduction in refugee rations to be perceived as an attempt to encourage refugees to leave.
 81. With regard to South Sudan he explained that the dyke had been built by WFP 15 years earlier. It had been damaged by severe flooding in 2020, which had triggered massive population displacement. No other actors had stepped forward to fix the dyke, and WFP had calculated that for an investment of USD 7.5 million in repairs the organization could save USD 100 million; as only USD 3.8 million had been raised, the expected saving was USD 30 million.

Middle East and North Africa portfolio

82. The Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa outlined the situation in the region, where 43 million people were suffering from hunger as a result of job losses, currency devaluation and price rises caused by conflict, fragile economic conditions and the COVID-19 pandemic. Ten of the 14 countries with WFP operations had seen currency devaluations, and food prices across the region had increased by an average of 70 percent, doubling or tripling in some countries compared to pre-COVID-19 levels. For its operations in the region, WFP needed USD 1.4 billion to support 31 million people until the end of 2021, but needs were increasing every day with alarming implications for peace and stability.
83. Funding shortages were particularly acute in some countries, including Jordan, where WFP would cut 21,000 refugees from its distribution lists in July and 250,000 in September unless it received additional funding; in the State of Palestine, where the recent conflict had destroyed infrastructure and damaged WFP livelihood projects; and the Syrian Arab Republic, where WFP was reaching only 5 million of the 8 million people it planned to assist, with a reduced ration, and together with other humanitarian actors awaited the renewal of the United Nations Security Council's cross-border resolution to allow the delivery of humanitarian assistance for the 3.8 million people living in the northwest of the country.
84. In Lebanon, in addition to the 1 million refugees WFP assisted, the country office planned to reach over 830,000 vulnerable Lebanese people by the end of the year and was working to implement an emergency safety net programme supported by the World Bank and the Government. In Yemen, recent donations had enabled WFP to return to full rations for 6 million people in the north, meaning that 10 million of the 13 million people it assisted were receiving full rations. When container vessels had stopped berthing at Al Hudaydah port owing to the conflict, WFP had chartered its own vessels, resulting in cost savings of USD 9 million over the previous year.

Imports of fuel for its partners had saved USD 5 million in costs for UNICEF and the World Health Organization in 2020.

85. Two out of ten WFP beneficiaries in the region participated in programmes aimed at changing lives. Under those programmes, 500,000 people in Yemen had rebuilt roads and schools, repaired water harvesting infrastructure and increased agricultural production; refugee women in the Islamic Republic of Iran were receiving salaries for making 10,000 face masks a day; and data for the public distribution system had been digitized in Iraq, reaching 50 percent efficiency. In addition, WFP supported 120 of the poorest villages in Egypt, providing training in smart farming, supporting community schools and providing women with entrepreneurship training and access to loans, all of which had resulted in an average 35 percent increase in income for families.
86. In closing, the Regional Director observed that investments such as these could help to create the conditions for sustainable peace. For example, in southern Libya a recent mission involving other agencies and donors had visited areas that had been inaccessible for three years, turning nexus discussions into a reality. In Anbar province in Iraq, WFP projects were bringing together rival groups. Similar projects were planned for Algeria, Armenia, Tunisia and Turkey.
87. Members expressed appreciation for WFP's efforts in creating working opportunities for people in the region and called on donors to increase their support for WFP interventions, particularly its assistance for Syrian refugees in Jordan and its responses in Yemen and the State of Palestine. Affirming his country's support for renewal of the Security Council's authorization of cross-border deliveries to the northwest of the Syrian Arab Republic, and for the reinstatement of crossings from Turkey and Iraq, one member urged WFP to encourage other United Nations agencies to join its advocacy to that end. There was also need for more collective advocacy of efforts to address issues with fuel imports into Yemen and with humanitarian access in Gaza and the West Bank. The same member asked about the repatriation of Iraqi refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic to Jeddah camp in Iraq and WFP's plans for providing emergency food assistance for Jeddah. Another member requested additional information about the health situation in Gaza following the destruction of clinics and hospitals during the recent conflict.
88. The Regional Director assured the Board that issues with food and fuel deliveries in Yemen had not had a dramatic impact on WFP operations. The Executive Director had successfully advocated the release of several vessels, and the Secretary-General's special envoy for Yemen was working with the various parties to find a sustainable solution. In Iraq, WFP was supporting returnees in Jeddah camp. The 46,000 people who had had to leave the camps were currently receiving general food assistance, and WFP planned to provide resilience programmes until they could be included in the public distribution system.

Southern Africa portfolio

89. The Regional Director for Southern Africa outlined the situation in the region, where a third wave of COVID-19 had started and WFP staff remained unvaccinated. WFP had reached 8.7 million people since the beginning of 2021, responding to emergencies while maintaining a strong focus on changing lives.
90. Climate change was the most significant long-term threat to food security in the region, with effects on agricultural and agropastoral livelihoods potentially leading to losses of up to USD 18 billion a year and affecting the food security of 44 million people. While the 2021 agriculture season had been good in many countries, other countries had suffered the lowest rainfall since 1981, and 42 million people were expected to be food insecure over the coming year. In response to the increasing frequency and severity of shocks, WFP was working with the Southern African Development Community on mainstreaming anticipatory action and

forecasting, working with national meteorological agencies on developing forecast-based financing systems as in Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

91. While 70 percent of the region's population depended on agriculture for food, income and employment, only 42 percent had access to an energy sufficient diet and only 20 percent could afford a healthy and nutrient sufficient diet. WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) were working with governments to develop improved, people-driven food systems and were closely involved in preparations for the United Nations food systems summit to be held in 2021. WFP's home-grown school feeding programmes, which currently reached 375,000 children in 11 countries, were central to its work on food systems and were linked to other interventions, such as those aimed at increasing market access for smallholder farmers.
92. The COVID-19 pandemic had accelerated the growth of hunger in urban areas of the region, with the loss of formal and informal employment sources increasing the need for social protection. WFP was working with the World Bank and other partners on strengthening the linkages between national social protection systems and emergency response, particularly in urban settings and including through the increased use of mobile money systems.
93. Turning to conditions in countries of particular concern, the Regional Director said that a volcanic eruption on Mount Nyiragongo in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had destroyed infrastructure and forced 400,000 people to leave their homes. Working with other United Nations agencies and the Government, WFP planned to assist 200,000 people over the following six months. With 27.3 million people throughout the country in IPC phase 3 or above, WFP required USD 128 million for its programmes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo over the next six months.
94. The crisis in northern Mozambique continued to deteriorate, with attacks by non-state armed groups in Cabo Delgado displacing more than 700,000 people. When the capital of Palma district had been attacked in March an additional 50,000 people had been forced to flee, and WFP had evacuated almost 400 humanitarian actors. In Cabo Delgado, WFP planned to reach 750,000 internally displaced persons and vulnerable members of host communities while promoting the resolution of the conflict. It required more than USD 12 million a month for those actions.
95. In the Grand Sud region of Madagascar, according to the most recent IPC exercise, 1.3 million people would be severely food insecure by September 2021, with 484,000 in IPC phase 4 and 28,000 in IPC phase 5. Urgent action was needed to avert the loss of life, and a Level 2 emergency had been declared. WFP planned to cover the most urgent needs of 675,000 people, for which it required USD 79 million to cover the period to March 2022.
96. The total amount needed for WFP's work in the region was USD 450 million to November 2021.
97. Board members thanked the Regional Director and her team for their work in the region, while individual members applauded in particular the efforts to build resilience and promote gender equality and WFP's collaboration and alignment with governments and other partners. Expressing concern about the low level of donor support for the responses in southern Madagascar and northern Mozambique, one member requested additional information on the regional bureau's plans for raising awareness of needs and mobilizing resources, ensuring sufficient staff and other resources for effective operations in Madagascar and deploying a large-capacity helicopter in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique.
98. The Regional Director said that Level 2 emergencies had been declared in Madagascar and Mozambique. The Level 2 emergency in Madagascar had been declared in June 2021, and that in Mozambique had been in place since March 2019. The regional bureau was reaching out to donors, and she thanked governments, the private sector and the World Bank for the support

that they had committed to providing for both responses. In addition, WFP, FAO and UNICEF were engaged in joint fundraising for operations in Madagascar. WFP was currently using fixed-wing aircraft for transport in Cabo Delgado and was in discussions with the Government with a view to increasing its air transport capacity. She thanked Board members for their financial and other support for WFP's work in the region.

Western Africa portfolio

99. The Regional Director for Western Africa warned of a high risk of further destabilization in the region. Nigeria, which was seeing escalating instability, insecurity and conflict, particularly in the northern states, where the Islamic State West Africa Province had been making significant inroads, was of grave concern given its economic importance for the region and the continent. Other countries were also facing serious security concerns: Burkina Faso had recently witnessed a surge of major security incidents in the east and Sahel areas; in Mali, the transitional president and prime minister had been forced to resign in late May and there had been recent clashes between non-State armed groups and local defence groups in the central Ségou region; the Niger had seen recurrent attacks with the deliberate targeting of civilian populations; Cameroon was facing multiple emergencies, including political crises in the North, West and South regions, the resurgence of Boko Haram in the Far North region and the continued influx of refugees from Central Africa in the East region; the Central African Republic was facing political instability, growing insecurity and economic collapse; and Chad was facing uncertainty and instability following the unexpected demise of its President.
100. The escalating violence, compounded by the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change, had resulted in an unprecedented food and nutrition security crisis. Over 31 million people were projected to be at crisis or emergency level (IPC phase 3 or higher) during the current lean season, up 150 percent from 2019 and 28 percent from 2020.
101. The risk of further destabilization, mass migration and the threat of famine remained clear and present dangers for the region.
102. WFP was supporting national response plans, focusing on the areas of acute need such as the Central Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and the Central African Republic. In the first quarter of 2021, the region's country offices had reached 9.6 million beneficiaries, 37 percent more than a year earlier, with in-kind distributions up 12 percent over the same period and cash-based transfers 35 percent as of the end of May.
103. The situation was the result of many years of poor governance and lack of development in the Sahel, making neglected areas easy prey for non-State armed groups and other detractors. Countries in the Central Sahel were already caught in the storm while coastal countries were at risk of being engulfed in their northern border regions.
104. WFP was supporting governments in an attempt to contain the situation and mitigate its effects. In Burkina Faso, for instance, WFP was aiming to assist 57 percent of national plan beneficiaries, 1.3 million people, during the lean season while building community resilience with regard to shocks and strengthening national systems. However, the WFP country office was facing a funding gap of USD 148 million for the next six months to meet the scale of the needs.
105. In Benin, WFP was supporting the Government-led integrated national school feeding programme, which procured 70 percent of its food locally (in-kind donations excluded) and currently reached 52 percent of primary schoolchildren, with a target of 100 percent by 2023. Full national ownership and financial sustainability were planned as part of the handover process, but a USD 56 million funding gap remained for the 2022 and 2023 school years.

106. In Ghana, prior to COVID-19 WFP had been playing an enabling role, working with stakeholders to make locally produced, affordable, nutritious food available in local markets as an important step towards preventing malnutrition and enhancing the country's human capital. Beyond increasing the availability of nutritious foods in the Ghanaian market, WFP's intervention also allowed the institution to procure directly from suppliers in the region to meet the growing needs within the region, reducing delivery lead time significantly.
107. WFP was also making critical investments to support national priorities in the region, including piloting senior national advisor positions in Senegal and Guinea as well as bolstering the regional country capacity strengthening team and enhancing the regional bureau's expertise in key areas such as climate-related programming and home-grown school feeding. Further engagement with the private sector was also a priority, from both a fundraising and a programmatic perspective, especially with regard to strengthening local food systems.
108. The Regional Director also provided an update on the Rome-based agencies' Joint Programme for the Sahel in Response to the Challenges of COVID-19, Conflict and Climate Change, known as SD3C. Implementation would begin once bilateral agreements were signed with governments and subsequently with implementing partners, including farmer organizations; the first such agreement was in place with the Senegal Government but delays were anticipated in Chad and Mali given the political situations in those countries.
109. Overall, the funding gap for the region for the next six months was USD 795 million as of June 2021.
110. Board members expressed appreciation for the comprehensive report, with those from the region underscoring the severity of the situation and those from outside the region registering alarm at the deepening food insecurity and rising levels of political instability and armed conflict reported. Several stressed their commitment to the region and reported on supporting activities being undertaken by their countries.
111. Members commended WFP for its ongoing work in the region, including its efforts to adapt to COVID-19 and rising global and regional food price trends, and underscored the importance of tackling root causes and taking a concerted approach with other actors. One member urged exploration of non-traditional sources of funding, including local sources, suggesting that a similar presentation by the Regional Director to national actors at the subregional level could help to convey the extreme severity of the situation and WFP's difficulties in raising funds.
112. Responding to questions, the Regional Director said that WFP's response to rising food prices in West Africa unfortunately had been to reduce rations to ensure continued assistance, but he cautioned that failing to meet all of the needs caused people to turn to negative coping mechanisms and thus generated long-term problems. On the procurement front, the regional bureau was working to implement the new WFP procurement policy and intended to document the impact of cash programming at the community level.
113. On the question of access, challenges sometimes stemmed from government policy, as in Nigeria where the Government did not want humanitarian work done in areas controlled by non-State armed groups. Engaging with governments was therefore critical. WFP had a four-pronged strategy with regard to access, consisting of strengthening staff and partner capacity for humanitarian negotiations, reinforcing humanitarian-military coordination, fostering community acceptance and enhancing its own capacity to collect and analyse information. High level discussion, at the level of the United Nations Security Council, was also needed.
114. Regarding the effectiveness of the cadre harmonisé process in a situation of deteriorating insecurity, COVID-19 restrictions and other impediments, the Regional Director assured members that the 2021 cadre harmonisé process had gone smoothly, with many COVID-19 restrictions already lifted, allowing comprehensive information to be collected.

115. Finally, with regard to resilience, the Regional Director reported that a joint programme with UNICEF in Mali, the Niger and Mauritania had revealed that WFP could strengthen resilience by supporting the improvement of social protection systems, addressing challenges such as missing data in social registries, data protection issues, lack of clarity on roles, outdated policies and inadequate transfer amounts. WFP planned to work with UNICEF and the World Bank to identify areas of social protection that needed improvement in the Sahel countries.

Latin America and the Caribbean portfolio

116. The Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean reported that, after nearly two years of negotiations, a memorandum of understanding allowing WFP to begin operations in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in full compliance with humanitarian principles had been signed. Twenty-four WFP staff members were already working on providing an initial 42,000 beneficiaries per month with take-home school meals, which would be gradually scaled up to 1.5 million in the 2022/2023 school year. The WFP transitional interim multi-country strategic plan for Latin American countries affected by the situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had recently been revised to provide for activities in the country; while the transitional interim multi-country strategic plan was currently scheduled to end on 31 August 2021, the Executive Board would soon be asked to extend it through August 2022 so that operations could commence and an interim country strategic plan could be prepared. The funding gap was USD 21 million for the next six months, with subsequent annual funding needs of USD 190 million.
117. Turning to the migratory crisis in South America, the Regional Director reported that in Colombia an estimated 52 percent of Colombians and 71 percent of migrants were severely or moderately food insecure. The pandemic had aggravated the humanitarian situation and, despite having taken measures to ensure the continuity of its operations, WFP had been prevented from reaching 10 percent of its 400,000 monthly beneficiaries in the current context of social unrest. Over the next six months, USD 62.1 million was needed to continue operations. On a positive note, under a new initiative called "Innovation for Nutrition (I4N)", WFP and the Government of Colombia planned to establish with the support of the Munich Innovation Accelerator a regional innovation centre where innovative ways to fight malnutrition could be identified, tested and scaled up.
118. In Ecuador, where targeting beneficiaries and providing food assistance was proving challenging owing to the continued arrival of migrants, WFP had assisted 270,000 people in 2020 and planned to assist 310,000 in 2021, for which it still needed USD 10.8 million. In Peru, which was in the grip of a serious COVID-19 wave, WFP was expanding its emergency operation but still had a funding gap of USD 24.7 million for the remainder of 2021.
119. In the Caribbean and Central America, the 2020 hurricane season had caused considerable damage in Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, adding to the health and climate crises. WFP was also responding to other crises in the area, including the recent volcanic eruption in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which had displaced 20 percent of the island's population. In addition to its multi-country office in Barbados, which focused on strengthening government and partner emergency response capacity in 22 small island states and territories, WFP was establishing a Caribbean regional logistics centre on behalf of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency and the Government of Barbados to serve as a focal point in the event of emergency.
120. The Dominican Republic and Cuba country offices were also strongly focused on social protection and disaster management and planned to reach 288,000 and 77,000 direct beneficiaries, respectively, in 2021. In Haiti, the constitutional crisis, coupled with the fragile economic and security situation, continued to drive up prices and erode food security, which, combined with

the approaching hurricane season and September elections, would make the next few months challenging. WFP operations had been impeded by roadblocks and internal displacement, with an estimated 650,000 people affected by the current wave of displacement. WFP was responding by distributing food from pre-positioned USAID-funded contingency stock and transporting humanitarian aid and equipment in support of humanitarian partners through the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) several times a week. The latest IPC analysis indicated that 4.4 million people were facing acute food insecurity. WFP planned to assist 1.3 million in 2021, with 600,000 people assisted to date through emergency food and cash distributions and 900,000 through resilience and school feeding activities.

121. In Central America, and in particular in the Dry Corridor, the number of moderately to severely food-insecure people had soared from 2.2 million in 2018 to 8.6 million in 2021. Seeing an urgent need to invest in the structural causes of migration and create local opportunities, WFP was undertaking a new study on migration, violence, climate and food security in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization of American States. WFP considered that it could play an important role in reducing outmigration by expanding its programmes to create local opportunities, the four main entry points being cash-based transfer programmes, employment generation schemes, school feeding programmes and scaled-up community resilience activities, complemented by a focus on social protection and scaled-up innovations with strategic partners. An estimated USD 1.7 billion over five years would enable WFP to reach 8 million severely and moderately food insecure people in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua in an attempt to generate the needed long-term responses.
122. Members commended WFP on its perseverance in finalizing a memorandum of understanding and establishing operations in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and its scale-up of emergency food assistance to Venezuelan migrants. They also expressed appreciation for WFP's leadership in hurricane preparedness and logistics, as well as its focus on addressing rising food security needs and building resilience, particularly in the Northern Triangle of Central America. One member held up school feeding as an exemplary programme that provided both avenues for development and access to families and the community that could be used to create opportunities.
123. Several members underscored the heightened difficulties facing the region, notably owing to climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, and drew attention to the important role the region played in global food security. One said that the severity of the climate change impacts in the region called for increased application of the principle of joint but differentiated responsibilities. Another expressed particular concern regarding potential delays in food distribution and accessibility to the most vulnerable populations in Haiti owing to the tenuous security situation in that country.
124. The Regional Director echoed comments regarding the dramatic change in the regional situation over the previous 20 months and concurred that food insecurity had geopolitical consequences in addition to its impact on hunger and that it was therefore important to ensure that the current situation did not generate even more instability. He also provided additional details on preparations for the forthcoming hurricane season, including the pre-positioning of food supplies and steps being taken to strengthen WFP's logistical capabilities in the Caribbean.

2021/EB.A/3 Country strategic plan – Cuba (2021–2024)

125. The Cuba Country Director introduced the CSP for Cuba for 2021–2024, providing additional information to put the plan in context. He reported that Cuba was experiencing its worst economic downturn of the last three decades, with gross domestic product declining 11 percent in 2020. Before the COVID-19 pandemic Cuba had been meeting 70 percent of its food needs

through imports, and the pandemic and the economic crisis had worsened the situation. Food security and nutrition were national priorities, therefore, with a national plan for food sovereignty adopted in 2020.

126. The upcoming hurricane season was expected to be active and there were fears that COVID-19 would spread widely in evacuation shelters and have a serious impact on an already weak economy. WFP planned to assist by supporting national emergency preparedness and response capacities, the national logistics system and cold chain capacity in addition to supporting vulnerability analysis and targeting tools and exploring with the Government new food assistance modalities such as cash-based transfers.
127. Members expressed strong support for the CSP, welcoming its alignment with the Government's priorities, the UNSDCF for Cuba and the 2030 Agenda and applauding its focus on food system resilience, nutrition, enhanced emergency preparedness and response capacity and sustainable social protection systems, saying that they responded to the country's needs. Several also welcomed the focus on gender and the emphasis on school feeding, and two members highlighted the use of microinsurance as a particularly welcome aspect of the plan.
128. Several members underscored the severity of climate change impacts in the region, notably on food systems, and welcomed the related focus in the CSP. One added that WFP had an important role to play in encouraging regional cooperation for resilience with regard to climate change and asked for additional information on that subject.
129. A number of members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, encouraged WFP to further strengthen its partnerships with FAO and IFAD as well as with other actors working in food security. One also said that South-South cooperation frameworks could play a valuable role.
130. One member encouraged WFP to promote locally available nutritious foods in addition to distributing specialized foods as a means of tackling malnutrition.
131. Several members said that the needs targeted by the CSP were in part attributable to the many decades of economic sanctions imposed on the country.
132. Reacting to the comments made, the Regional Director said that WFP and other agencies played an important role in emergency preparedness. Pre-positioned supplies were key to a prompt response to disaster. In the long term, resilience and sustainability were key, and support for local production, strengthening cooperatives and links with schools all played a role in that regard. WFP also needed to take a long-term view when providing food.
133. Following approval of the CSP, Mr José Carlos Rodríguez Ruiz, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Cuba to the Rome-based organizations, made a brief statement, saying that the CSP included innovative aspects that should enhance its efficiency and effectiveness and that it would have a direct impact on vulnerable populations. Cuba's economy was suffering the negative effects of climate change and COVID-19, but nothing affected it more than the economic and financial blockade that had been in place for more than 60 years. Food security and nutrition were, along with health and education, main priorities for the Cuban Government, which would continue to implement policies and laws aimed at strengthening the country's institutions, enhancing development, increasing autonomy and diversifying production, particularly in agriculture.

Annual reports

2021/EB.A/4 Annual performance report for 2020

134. Thanking Board members for their input during recent consultations on the annual performance report, the Deputy Director, Corporate Planning and Performance Division, presented a snapshot of WFP's achievements and challenges in 2020. Despite additional obstacles caused by the

COVID-19 pandemic, WFP had reached a record number of 115.5 million people in 85 countries, including through scaled up emergency response, increased support for national safety net systems and expanded use of cash-based transfers. Access problems and pipeline breaks, however, had forced reductions in ration sizes in some countries. Overall the organization had made strong progress against outcome indicators but important challenges remained in some areas. Work was under way on updating the corporate results framework and indicators for the forthcoming strategic plan.

135. Board members, including several speaking on behalf of lists, applauded WFP's achievements in responding rapidly and flexibly to the pandemic while maintaining its ongoing operations in conflict- and crisis-affected countries. Speakers welcomed the continued prioritization of emergency response and urged management to maintain that priority in the new strategic plan while striking an appropriate balance between humanitarian and development work in line with the operational setting, WFP's core strengths and its role with partners across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.
136. Turning to funding issues, Board members, including those speaking on behalf of lists, reiterated concerns regarding the low share of flexible funding and WFP's dependence on a small number of large donors, particularly in view of the likely funding challenges that lay ahead. Board members encouraged management to continue to explore innovative solutions to those challenges, particularly through partnerships with the private sector, South-South and triangular cooperation, engagement with international financial institutions and the innovative use of debt swaps, requesting more detailed updates on the use of debt swaps in future reporting. Board members also encouraged management to continue its pursuit of cost savings and efficiency gains, including through the digitalization of data systems and the creation of economies of scale at both the WFP and inter-agency levels.
137. While expressing satisfaction with the decreased number of outstanding audit recommendations awaiting full implementation, Board members expressed concern about the low proportion of evaluation recommendations implemented in 2020 and the mixed results on CSP performance reported under key performance indicator 1. They requested more information about those issues and asked management how it planned to address them. Other challenges that Board members said required continued and enhanced attention included recurrent pipeline breaks, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply chains and humanitarian access constraints.
138. With regard to the report itself, Board members welcomed the new features introduced and requested that future annual performance reports provide more transparent accounting of beneficiary data and more information on critical corporate initiatives (CCIs), in line with the External Auditor's recommendations; deeper analysis of the results of global staff surveys; clearer information on collaboration with partners, particularly on localization and country capacity strengthening; and greater disaggregation of information on beneficiaries, including in respect of vulnerabilities and disabilities, costs per beneficiary in various operational settings and the use of cash-based transfers.
139. Management took note of the points raised; undertook to provide the additional information requested in future reports, drawing attention to the annual performance report dashboard, which provided more disaggregated information than the published document; and recalled that the lower performance recorded under key performance indicator (KPI) 1 on CSP implementation reflected the more stringent definition of achievement introduced in the 2020 report. Management noted that the reported percentages of achievement against KPI 1 were not a measure of the level of achievement of specific targets but rather a proportion of total outputs or outcomes considered "achieved or on track". Management also noted that "partial achievement" of KPI 1 was no longer measured, a key difference from the previous year; an analysis of partial achievement would have indicated that 78 percent of outcomes and 68 percent

of outputs had been achieved or were on track. Many of the issues raised would be returned to during the current Board session or at future Board consultations and sessions throughout the year.

Administrative and managerial matters

Address by staff representative bodies to the Board

140. The President of the WFP Professional Staff Association focused much of his address on the internal justice system used by WFP and FAO, which had not been changed since 2002 and in which the appeals process for a staff member seeking to challenge an administrative or disciplinary decision could take up to five or six years to complete, resulting in many staff members abandoning their cases. In addition, certain elements of the system seemed to lack the necessary separation of functions, neutrality and impartiality. The association hoped that the ongoing review of some aspects of the internal justice system would lead to major improvements. With regard to other issues he said that some progress had been made in addressing racism, but he called on management to involve staff representatives more fully in the effort to do so. More than 1,500 respondents to the 2021 global staff survey had reported direct experience of racism at WFP, and 2,300 had reported having witnessed racist incidents.
141. The General Secretary of the Union of General Service Staff began her address by expressing gratitude to WFP management and the staff of many divisions at headquarters for the care and support they had directed to staff and their families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
142. The union had participated in consultations with management on the people policy; the comprehensive action plan for addressing harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination; the review of the internal justice system; and staff redeployment. Staff concerns regarding job security, the reporting and handling of abusive conduct, misuse of performance assessments, diversity and inclusion and ethics had been raised with management and, while greater efforts were needed in some areas, management seemed to be genuinely committed to addressing the issues reported. Staff were also assured that their return to headquarters once COVID-19-related restrictions were lifted would take into consideration all the risks involved, while it was hoped that staff who could and wished to continue working from home would be allowed to do so.
143. The Executive Director thanked the speakers for their addresses and reiterated management's commitment to empowering, inspiring and respecting all WFP staff. While agreeing that the ongoing review of the internal justice system with FAO was long overdue, he disagreed with the suggestion that the Professional Staff Association had not been appropriately involved in efforts to improve WFP workplace culture and said that the Assistant Executive Director, Workplace Culture Department, had held 22 meetings with the association since December 2020, seven of which had been dedicated to diversity and inclusion.

Annual reports (continued)

2021/EB.A/5 Annual report of the Ethics Office for 2020

144. In her address, the Director of the Ethics Office underscored the value of advice and guidance to all employees, especially in the field, where the overwhelming majority of employees worked. She said that the record number of advisories in 2020 was a reflection of the high level of trust that the Ethics Office had earned over the years. She reported on good governance, citing the annual conflict of interest and financial disclosure programme as an example, and the many recommendations on the development and revision of policies and practices. She said that there had been great advances in the development of policies and procedures, standard operating procedures and templates, tracking systems and more with regard to retaliation. She also said,

however, that there was a need to further address the fear of retaliation at WFP, which remained widespread, noting that there had been relatively few requests for protection. She closed by acknowledging with appreciation the trust placed in her and the Ethics Office as the corporate focal point for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) and expressing pride in the advances in that capacity.

145. Board members praised the important work of the Director and her team, saying that they played an important role in nurturing a culture of ethics and fostering a positive workplace culture. One said that the WFP Ethics Office was a model for other United Nations agencies, as shown by its involvement in various United Nations system-wide initiatives. Several urged WFP to ensure that the Ethics Office was appropriately staffed for its workload; others said that it was important to safeguard its independence within the organization.
146. One Board member asked when the Ethics Office strategy on PSEA and the revision of WFP's code of conduct would be finalized. She called on WFP to ensure that all PSEA focal points were up to date with their training and recommended that WFP institute mandatory annual ethics training for all staff, adding that she was concerned that the Director had had to advocate the inclusion of ethics issues in WFP training. She welcomed the planned analysis of the reasons behind the fear of retaliation and the low number of requests for protection from retaliation and urged WFP to reflect the findings in its whistleblower protection policy. She also called for the inclusion of the subject of ethics and the participation of the Ethics Office in the induction of country directors and deputy directors and in middle manager training programmes.
147. Another Board member expressed pleasure at the measures adopted with regard to PSEA and praised the multilingual "PSEA at the Frontline" project, saying that it was necessary to address challenges in understanding related to PSEA. She requested more context for the 308 PSEA-related matters that had been reviewed in 2020 to make it possible to gauge progress in that area. She also asked how WFP provided guidance to field offices on assistance to PSEA victims and about work relevant to ensuring that community-based complaint mechanisms were effective.
148. Board members asked about the annual conflict of interest and financial disclosure programme and, in particular, whether it was anticipated that the population covered by the programme would be further expanded.
149. The Director explained that the population covered by the disclosure programme was reviewed annually and that the latest analysis did not indicate a need to expand it further.
150. Regarding PSEA, the Director explained how WFP approached victim assistance, saying that all work was conducted with a victim-centred approach.
151. Regarding the number of advisories the Director explained that with the new database it was possible to undertake more relevant analysis. In that regard she said that there were some country offices that had not sought any Ethics Office advice in 2020, noting that she had discussed that fact directly with the regional directors and intended to conduct education and outreach initiatives.
152. The Director echoed Board members' comments to the effect that the independence of the Ethics Office was critical. Management noted that the latest reorganization had resulted in the Ethics Office reporting administratively to the Workplace Culture Department. The Executive Director and the Deputy Executive Director both commented positively on their direct interactions with the Director of the Ethics Office

153. The Director of the Office of the Ombudsman and Mediation Services said that there were signs of progress in the development of an inclusive workplace culture at WFP. Her office's annual report included recommendations focused on tackling racial and gender bias, creating enhanced awareness of neurodivergent needs and mental health challenges, improving the internal justice system, and ensuring transparency in action plans, decision making and data sharing.
154. Management welcomed the report and agreed with all the recommendations. Many actions that tackled the issues raised in the report were already being implemented within the framework of the comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination; other initiatives – relating to things such as tools for preventing bias and training in creating psychologically safe environments, supporting individual behaviour change and handling abusive conduct – were being developed.
155. Board members praised the report's analysis and recommendations and welcomed management's positive response to it. Some members supported the Ombudsman's suggestion and called for the urgent development of an internal justice strategy, closely linked to the people policy. Others underscored the importance of transparency and urged WFP to improve its reporting on racial and gender bias.
156. Speaking on behalf of his list, one Board member observed that despite the progress made significant numbers of staff continued to report incidents of harassment or discrimination; the share of staff who perceived a lack of accountability for misconduct was also cause for concern.
157. Other Board members welcomed the positive trends seen in WFP's recent global staff survey and encouraged the organization to continue to work to reduce the incidence of all forms of misconduct. One Board member asked whether the decline in the number of contacts with the Ombudsman in 2020 could reflect a lack of access for some offices, considering the switch to online interaction.
158. Several Board members said that it was important to safeguard the independence of the Ombudsman and to ensure her involvement in senior leadership discussions, particularly those related to the people policy and workplace culture. One member sought more details on how WFP would assess its leaders' commitment to integrity in decision making; she also asked whether managers were required to participate in leadership training. Another Board member asked for details of how WFP could learn from how other United Nations organizations handled mediation.
159. The Ombudsman said that she shared the concern that virtual exchanges were an inadequate substitute for face-to-face contact and emphasized that her team was ready to resume in-person visits as soon as feasible. With the Assistant Executive Director, Workplace Culture, she had begun to explore internal justice models used in other organizations. She held regular meetings with the Chief of Staff and would seek to increase her involvement in senior leadership meetings where appropriate.
160. Regarding the internal justice system, she said there was a need to move from a mentality of reporting to one of resolution. She also noted that conclusions from a 2016 independent review of the United Nations internal justice system could inform WFP efforts.
161. Management added that the disciplinary process had been reviewed in 2020 and that a review of the FAO appeals process could also provide a basis for ensuring the effective functioning of WFP's internal justice system. The Human Resources Division would shortly share with the Board WFP's 2020 disciplinary report, which gave insight into the current status of the system.
162. The Human Resources Division tracked completion rates with regard to mandatory training and took prompt action to address poor compliance. WFP would develop a key performance indicator

in order to gauge whether managers were providing the caring and supportive leadership outlined in paragraph 37 of the people policy.

Policy issues (continued)

2021/EB.A/7 WFP people policy

163. The Assistant Executive Director, Workplace Culture Department, presented the WFP people policy, which addressed recommendations made in the recent evaluation of the WFP people strategy and was based on four priorities: “nimble and flexible”; “performing and improving”; “diverse and inclusive”; and “caring and supportive”. While initial implementation of the policy in 2021 was funded from existing resources, from 2022 onwards it would be funded through the management plan, CSP budgets and other WFP funding mechanisms. Other ongoing WFP initiatives related to the people policy included the establishment of a people policy coordination function within the Workplace Culture Department and a diversity and inclusion team reporting directly to the Director of Human Resources and the development of a diversity and inclusion strategy and anti-racism action plan, under which “courageous conversations” aimed at expanding inclusion, equity and equality measures were due to start in July and August.
164. Board members, including several speaking on behalf of their lists, expressed appreciation for the consultative process through which the policy had been developed, saying that the involvement of WFP staff, management and Member States would ensure strong commitment to implementation across WFP. They welcomed the provisions for increased diversity and inclusion, protection against all forms of harassment, abuse and discrimination, fairer contractual arrangements and data protection and privacy.
165. Board members said that the policy would contribute to a respectful workplace culture. They also said that they looked forward to hearing about future improvements in the representation of people from developing countries, women, young people and people with disabilities at all levels of the WFP workforce; nevertheless, it was essential that all appointments be based on merit. They expressed the view that the new gender policy would be a valuable tool in such efforts. Board members expressed support for integrating policy implementation into regional work plans and CSPs and said that it was important to support regional bureaux and country offices while holding them accountable throughout the implementation of the policy. Members also recommended that implementation be informed by lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the importance of flexibility, adaptability and WFP’s duty of care.
166. Expressing satisfaction with the quantitative KPIs included in the policy document, members speaking on behalf of lists urged management to develop and present a full set of quantitative and qualitative KPIs disaggregated, where relevant, by gender, nationality, disability and language. The KPIs should be subject to future adjustments based on periodic reviews and evaluations, and enhanced data collection – including on gender and diversity for the anti-racism action plan and on language proficiency and other skills – would be important. In addition, the development of an accountability framework, and regular reviews by the leadership group of the reports issued by regional bureaux, would strengthen accountability.
167. Several members speaking for lists expressed concern about the steady increases in annual expenditure foreseen throughout the period of the policy and called on WFP to seek opportunities to reduce costs. Implementation would require sustained prioritization and commitment throughout WFP and should be fully integrated into regular budget processes, including the management plan, while monitoring and reporting should be incorporated into corporate reporting instruments. One member speaking for a list requested that detailed proposals for any future one-off investments or initiatives related to implementation of the policy be presented to the Board.

168. The Assistant Executive Director took note of the points raised and drew attention to annex V of the document, which outlined the investments foreseen in structures, systems and processes for policy implementation. WFP was exploring opportunities for cost savings. The forthcoming staffing framework addressed issues with contractual modalities and would be essential in fulfilling the objectives of the people policy. She and the Executive Director thanked the Board for its support throughout the development of the policy.

2021/EB.A/8 Revised anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy

169. The Chief Risk Officer and Director, Enterprise Management Division, presented a revision of the 2015 anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy, which addressed issues with underreporting; clarified the scope and applicability of the policy, including in relation to non-financial fraud; provided clearer definitions of terminology and management accountabilities and obligations; and incorporated feedback received from Board members at an informal consultation in March 2021. Following approval, the policy would be launched through an Executive Director's circular and video message, and guidance for directors and country offices had been prepared. Much of the embedding of the policy in the field would be effected through the sharing of information on fraud exposure and mitigation with United Nations country teams.
170. Board members, including two speaking on behalf of lists, welcomed the revised policy, saying that it would help to mitigate risk and prevent, detect and respond to incidents of fraud and corruption. They expressed particular satisfaction with the provisions for managing risks related to the actions of cooperating partners; the policy's clear message of zero tolerance for inaction in the face of alleged fraud or corruption; the monitoring of employees' completion of mandatory training; and the emphasis on reporting suspected cases to the Inspector General.
171. Members said that it was important to apply the provisions of the policy in all WFP offices and divisions, ensure the correct application of all internal controls, provide any training required to that end, and strengthen mechanisms for the protection of whistle-blowers. One member speaking for a list recommended particular vigilance with regard to partners operating in conflict settings or whose actions could pose reputational risk to WFP. Questions were raised regarding the gathering and sharing of lessons learned across WFP; the support provided to managers in handling their new responsibilities under the policy; the assessment and monitoring of policy implementation; any additional costs for implementation; and sanctions as well as legal action under local laws.
172. Members looked forward to receiving regular updates on the policy at quarterly oversight briefings by the Office of the Inspector General.
173. Management said that the gathering and dissemination of lessons learned was the responsibility of all three lines of defence: the first line as implementers of the policy; the second line through their provision of specialist support, awareness raising and training; and the third line through its investigations and proactive integrity reviews. Information on third parties was shared with United Nations country teams, and sanctions were managed by a sanctions committee. While implementation of the policy did not incur any additional costs, the Enterprise Risk Management Division had received partial funding to cover two anti-fraud and anti-corruption specialist positions and planned to recruit another one or two specialists in the near future.

2021/EB.A/9 Revised policy for disclosure of oversight reports issued by the Office of the Inspector General

174. The Inspector General ad interim presented the revised policy on the disclosure of oversight reports issued by the Office of the Inspector General, which had been revised to align with the 2019 revised charter of the Office of the Inspector General. Notably, the 2019 charter redefined the purpose of inspection reports, which would as a result no longer be

publicly disclosed. The revised disclosure policy reflected that change, as well as new documents and recently introduced practices.

175. Members welcomed the revised policy and expressed appreciation for WFP's commitment to transparency and information sharing, as well as for the opportunity to engage in informal consultations on WFP's disclosure practices.
176. Two members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, also welcomed the use of the restricted portal of the Executive Board to share documents, with one saying that it would increase access to important documents and the other, speaking on behalf of a list, saying that restricted access would strengthen trust between WFP and Member States. With one saying that the Inspector General must exercise discretion in sharing information, both expressed appreciation that information on significant matters raised through advisories would be disclosed to the Board, notably in the office's quarterly and annual reports, and the member speaking on behalf of a list suggested that the office also disclose significant matters identified in reports on partners to ensure that the Board was aware of major risks.
177. Ms Hirsch confirmed that, as in previous years, the office would meet with the Board to discuss any critical issues raised in advisory reports. She also clarified that reports on partners concerned third parties and that the disclosure policy specifically stipulated that the contents of such reports could only be disclosed with their permission. Responding to a question she said that the revised policy would not apply retroactively; hence inspection reports previously disclosed would continue to be available on the website.

2021/EB.A/10 Update on the implementation plan of the WFP protection and accountability policy

178. The Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department, said that the implementation plan for the WFP protection and accountability policy was WFP's first ever detailed estimate of a budget required to implement a policy. The budget covered estimated needs at headquarters and regional offices, but not day-to-day operational costs, and still had to be incorporated into the corporate budget process. WFP was working to map and cost a range of protection activities to gain a better idea of what was required.
179. The Director, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, presented an update on the implementation plan, covering planned investments to enable policy implementation over the next five years; the country-level protection and accountability action plan developed to guide country offices in implementing the elements of the policy; and the “community engagement for accountability to affected populations” strategy and monitoring framework that accompanied the implementation plan, which would enable headquarters to report on the community engagement plan. He also said that WFP, along with the global protection cluster and others, planned to launch an online global food platform for publishing first-hand stories and recipes linked to displacement and protection issues to demystify the link between protection and basic needs. Other means of disseminating information would also be introduced.
180. Board members welcomed the update on the implementation plan and reiterated their support for the protection and accountability policy itself, including its focus on a human rights-based approach. One member, speaking on behalf of a list, characterized the elements of the plan as feasible and relevant to the socioeconomic context of the post-COVID-19 era. Another, also speaking on behalf of a list, underscored the importance of a good implementation plan and hence the need to appropriately reference the policy in WFP's strategic plan and future corporate results frameworks.
181. Two members, both speaking on behalf of lists, said that it was important to ensure that marginalized and vulnerable groups could access food and assistance safely. One urged WFP to promote a nuanced and accessible approach to accountability to affected populations and

- community engagement, including by having well-functioning and accessible complaint mechanisms in every country where it worked, and advocated a victim- and survivor-centred approach to sexual exploitation and abuse.
182. The same two members welcomed the emphasis on the collective responsibility of all actors, including beneficiaries, to contribute to protection and accountability. One, while welcoming the work being done in that regard by WFP with its partners, called on WFP also to assist other organizations and stakeholders with their protection and accountability work, while the other asked for additional information on WFP's strategy for ensuring buy-in and commitment from local partners and others and on how WFP planned to ensure that protection and accountability to affected populations were better integrated into needs assessments, project design and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the country level.
 183. One member, speaking on behalf of a list, said that it was necessary to properly fund and execute new policies and underpin them with incentives that supported corporate implementation and acceptance. Fully mainstreaming the protection and accountability policy into operational costs and the programme support and administrative (PSA) budget would make it more consistent and sustainable, and successful implementation of the policy would uphold the safety and dignity of WFP's beneficiaries, restore their well-being, empower them to ensure that humanitarian and development assistance was designed and implemented in their best interests and enable them to contribute to the mitigation of conflict. Ultimately, the extra costs of the policy would be repaid at the outcome level in the form of reduced exposure to risks, greater beneficiary agency and a peace dividend.
 184. Two members speaking on behalf of lists noted the updates to the protection and accountability policy, including improvements in respect of human resources, strategic planning and risk assessment and progress in streamlining the financial resources for protection and accountability objectives, and one encouraged WFP also to improve its data collection policy and strategies.
 185. The Deputy Director, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, provided three examples showing how WFP had been integrating the protection and accountability policy into its programming since the adoption of the policy in November 2020 and explained that a community engagement strategy and a new protection and accountability handbook would help WFP offices at all levels to implement the policy. He also responded to a question regarding when data on indicators for such new policies would become available, indicating that consistent reporting of data using the same standard could be expected by a reasonable number of countries by 2023.
 186. The Director, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, added three points. First, WFP was aware of the need to work with its partners and was sharing best practices, training and data and analytical work and, in the context of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), was leading a discussion on bringing in a risk management approach to manage protection risks to affected populations and communities. Second, as the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system had prioritized inclusion, WFP was developing a coherent inclusion agenda, primarily through the protection and accountability policy. Third, the policy called for both tailored approaches to protection and a uniform approach in terms of standards and techniques, which would be reflected in the forthcoming second-generation CSPs.
 187. The Assistant Executive Director assured members that, as WFP entered a new budget cycle with the bottom up strategic budgeting exercise (BUSBE), work on protection and accountability was positioned for mainstreaming within the budgeting process. Protection was also being strongly positioned within the strategic plan, with the encouragement of the Board.

2021/EB.A/11 Update on WFP's role in the collective humanitarian response (2020)

188. The Director of WFP's Geneva Office described the enormous challenges faced in 2020 arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, increased poverty and vulnerability, complex conflicts and weather extremes. WFP had played a central role in the global response to the pandemic and in the IASC; the organization had also been providing regular updates to the United Nations crisis management team on COVID-19 and had contributed to the global action plan for healthy lives and well-being for all.
189. WFP was heavily engaged in efforts to avert famine in 2021. With FAO, the organization had launched a call for action on famine mitigation and participated in the high-level task force on preventing famine. Other engagement included support for the International Council of Voluntary Agencies in developing an open letter on famine prevention and the co-hosting of a side event on famine at the 2021 humanitarian affairs segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. As part of its commitment to working at the humanitarian–development–peace nexus, WFP was co-chairing a United Nations dialogue on the collective implementation of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee recommendation on the nexus.
190. Speaking on behalf of their lists, two Board members commended WFP for scaling up its emergency response and meeting the challenges of 2020 in collaboration with other United Nations agencies and partners.
191. One expressed concern over the capacity of the humanitarian community to respond to the challenges that lay ahead, calling for better coordination, distribution of tasks and prioritization. Praising WFP's "whole of crisis" approach, she said there was an urgent need to develop nexus programming and that COVID-19 recovery plans should address food insecurity as a priority. The second list representative urged WFP to focus on capacity building and the transformation of agri-food systems in order to support achievement of the SDGs. She said that partnerships should be central to COVID-19 recovery efforts and called for better coordination through the IASC.
192. Several other Board members asked WFP to provide an update on progress made in addressing cash coordination challenges, noting that the organization had not signed a recent call for action on cash coordination despite being a signatory of the United Nations Common Cash Statement.
193. One Board member urged WFP to continue to support the empowerment of women and girls and welcomed activities aimed at reducing and preventing discrimination, including against people with disabilities. Another asked for an update on the integration of complaint mechanisms into all operations and on the results of the system-wide questionnaire on improved reporting of sexual harassment in the United Nations system. She asked when the findings of the evaluations of the Yemen humanitarian crisis and the COVID-19 humanitarian response would be available and whether Member States would have the opportunity to provide input. She also asked how the strategic plan would strengthen WFP's contribution to humanitarian response.
194. One Board member praised WFP efforts to collect evidence for its approach to peacebuilding. Another urged WFP to enhance its partnerships, particularly with the other Rome-based agencies and with international financial institutions. She encouraged WFP to strengthen its localization agenda and ensure greater integration of gender issues and asked for regular updates on that work.
195. One Board member encouraged WFP to learn lessons from the COVID-19 response and to develop its capacity with regard to common services and preparedness for major emergencies. She asked for more information on the joint programmes established with the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and collaboration with the other Rome-based agencies. She encouraged WFP and partners to prioritize cash transfers over vouchers and to expand data interoperability

efforts in order to avoid duplication of activities while ensuring the protection of beneficiary data. She also asked WFP to continue to work towards joint analysis and response priority setting within the clusters.

196. The Assistant Executive Director, Programme and Policy Development Department, clarified that WFP supported cash coordination and led cash coordination cells in many countries, which worked on issues such as harmonizing transfer levels for common objectives. Regarding the common cash statement, she reported that agreement had yet to be reached in a few areas, and WFP was pushing for solutions on the outstanding issues. As a member of IASC, WFP was technically a recipient of the letter calling for action on cash coordination rather than a potential signatory. She offered to engage in bilateral briefings on the outstanding issues with interested Board members and welcomed their guidance.
197. The Director, Emergency Operations Division, confirmed that Rome-based agency collaboration had been strengthened through the food security cluster; an updated joint letter of intent reinforcing the importance of local partnerships and a people-centred approach was ready to be signed. WFP had also been working with FAO on early warning and anticipatory action, and the two agencies were seen as the technical leads for the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund anticipatory action portfolio.
198. She observed that the COVID-19 response had demonstrated the importance of preparedness, particularly for global pandemics. An ongoing evaluation of WFP's Level 3 operations and joint preparedness with other agencies was revealing many valuable lessons in that regard.
199. The Director of the Geneva Office said that WFP hoped that sufficient resources would be available to prevent famine in 2021 and beyond. She added that 2021 would be a critical year in which the success of the collective human response would depend on the collective capacity to avert famine, improve food security and resume progress towards the SDGs.

Update on WFP's implementation of United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/279 (repositioning the United Nations development system)

200. Management updated the Board on WFP's progress in implementing United Nations development system reform at the country, regional and global levels. WFP was actively engaged in the review of the management and accountability framework, and business operations reforms remained on track. Forty UNSDCFs had been finalized. WFP was actively mobilized to ensure close alignment between the frameworks and CSPs both in cycle and content; United Nations socioeconomic response plans for COVID-19 would also be fully integrated into UNSDCFs by the end of 2021. In line with this effort, the WFP socioeconomic response and recovery framework for the COVID-19 crisis would also be progressively mainstreamed in WFP strategic and programmatic frameworks at all levels. Most of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group task teams that had been established to facilitate the rollout of key United Nations reform elements had concluded their work. WFP continued to engage in the remaining three task teams and the United Nations advisory group on developing new global guidance on joint programming, as well as in the development of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review results monitoring framework.
201. Speaking on behalf of his list, one Board member said that it was important to support resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and thus to strengthen system-wide support at the local and regional levels. He praised the progress made in the development of UNSDCFs, common country analyses, shared business operations, including co-location, and Rome-based agency shared services. He welcomed WFP engagement in the task teams on the COVID-19 socioeconomic response, on the Secretary-General's roadmap on financing to achieve the 2030 Agenda and on business innovations and in the work of a dedicated inter-agency advisory

group on joint programming. He also called for due consideration of accountability and transparency in operations.

202. One Board member praised WFP for being ahead of the curve in reform implementation, at the same time urging it to ensure that the update to the management and accountability framework did not result in push-back against reforms or any undermining of the role of the United Nations resident coordinators. Another Board member asked management to share its views on the 1 percent levy used to partly fund the resident coordinator system, saying that the mechanism did not appear to work well.
203. Management thanked Board members for their support and noted their concerns. On the 1 percent levy, they replied that the funding of the resident coordinator system was being re-examined as part of the ongoing membership-led review of the system. It was also suggested that rather than the 1 percent levy being deducted from a contribution it instead be added on top of the original contribution amount.

Resource, financial and budgetary matters

2021/EB.A/12 Annual report of the Audit Committee

204. The Chair of the Audit Committee presented the main points of the Committee's annual report, highlighting the annual financial statements and internal controls, particularly with regard to the role of the Enterprise Risk Management Division, the Office of the Inspector General and the Ethics Office. He also offered brief remarks regarding the impact of COVID 19 on internal control processes.
205. Members welcomed the Committee's report and its positive conclusion that no material weaknesses had been identified and that internal controls were functioning despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. They also offered comments on the areas for improvement identified by the Committee.
206. Regarding enterprise risk management, members, including one speaking on behalf of a list and another speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said that the Enterprise Risk Management Division had made substantial progress since its establishment but still had to mature further to be fully effective; one member asked what steps were being taken in that regard. The members also raised concerns regarding the high-risk items on WFP's risk register and urged management to take measures to attenuate those risks and to report on actions taken and related assurance work. One member asked for information on what had led to the identification of residual risks and the necessary actions to reduce those risks further.
207. With regard to the Office of the Inspector General, several members, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noted with concern the issues raised in the report regarding overdue corrective action and urged management to address those issues promptly. One member expressed support for the Committee's suggestion that additional human resources be made available to the Office of Inspections and Investigations within the Office of the Inspector General. Another, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the revision of the anti-fraud and anti-corruption policy, strengthened management accountability and the escalation of material cases to address control issues in a timely manner and encourage further awareness-raising on fraud prevention for WFP staff and implementing partners.
208. One member said there was a lack of narrative on the Committee's views on WFP's people policy, which was troubling given WFP's longstanding issues with human resource management and workplace culture. Another member, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, said there was a need to focus on people and staff wellness and encouraged WFP to integrate the lessons learned from the pandemic into its operating framework, including by developing new guidance for monitoring and expanding the use of remote monitoring mechanisms.

209. Concerning the internal audit, several members, including one speaking on behalf of a group of countries and another speaking on behalf of a list, expressed concern about the number of overdue audit high-risk actions and encouraged the development of mitigation measures to address the situation. The member speaking on behalf of a group of countries noted that several recommendations formulated by the external auditors related to the training of WFP staff in fraud prevention and detection and the strengthening of internal controls, suggesting that they would require close follow-up by WFP management. Along the same lines, another member recalled extensive discussions regarding the risk of WFP's decentralized model leading to over-customization of core tasks and the perception of controls as optional and recommended that WFP focus on that concern.
210. One member, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, welcomed the recommendations of the performance audits on CCIs and the management of beneficiary information, in particular with regard to data management and improvement and standardization of the WFP's digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform (SCOPE), and encouraged WFP to report on the follow-up of those recommendations and to explore guidance for alternative identification and verification mechanisms for beneficiary information management.
211. Management was asked to provide information on the implementation of guidance on remote oversight and digital approvals with regard to beneficiary management, as well as on the level of interaction between management and the Director of the Ethics Office.
212. The Chair of the Audit Committee acknowledged the members' interest in being kept informed, in particular with regard to enterprise risk management, fraud and oversight. As for oversight, the Chief Financial Officer said that a baseline budget was being developed through BUSBE. Regarding enterprise risk management, he said that action was being taken to identify mitigation actions and residual risks and strengthen risk appetite and monitoring processes; regular risk monitoring reports and risk discussions had been introduced in several country operations, as envisaged by the enterprise risk management policy. He also noted that robust risk management called for the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, which required a change in culture.
213. The Chief Financial Officer acknowledged the questions and comments relating to beneficiary information management but suggested that they be addressed under the item on the annual report of the Inspector General, which covered that topic.
214. On the question of interactions between management and the Ethics Office, the Deputy Executive Director confirmed that the Director of the Ethics Office met regularly with him and the Chief of Staff, and with the Executive Director when the latter's travel schedule permitted.

2021/EB.A/13 Annual report of the Inspector General and note by the Executive Director

215. The acting Inspector General presented the annual report of the Office of the Inspector General, noting that no material weaknesses in governance, risk management or control processes had been identified through the work done in 2020. The report nonetheless flagged concerns for management's attention related to beneficiary information management, systems integration and a lack of clear direction and prioritization with regard to planning, resourcing, monitoring and reporting activities.
216. Speaking on behalf of the Executive Director, the Chief of Staff praised the report and the work of the Office of the Inspector General. He outlined progress made in tackling the issues raised in the report, including through the closure of many overdue audit actions in 2020.
217. All Board members who spoke welcomed the report and what they termed excellent work. Speaking on behalf of her list, one Board member praised the quality and clarity of the report, the diversity of the Office of the Inspector General team and WFP's continued zero tolerance for inaction in the face of misconduct. She urged management to introduce deterrents and

- increased standardization to prevent fraud and requested more details on the fraud schemes identified through the proactive integrity review on cash-based transfers. She also sought clarification of the methods used to assess gender mainstreaming.
218. Several Board members underscored the importance of the work of the Office of the Inspector General, calling on management to ensure that it was sufficiently resourced and stressing that the timely completion of investigations was important to building confidence. One member asked how the Office of Inspections and Investigations had been able to conduct so many investigations in 2020; another asked for an update on how management was strengthening the second line of defence. In terms of decentralization, controls and the second line of defence, Board members expressed concern regarding unclear minimum controls in emergencies and inconsistent application of controls.
 219. Beneficiary information management was also an area of concern among Board members, as highlighted for the third year in a row. They urged WFP to increase standardization and address the over-customization of SCOPE and other platforms. One Board member requested that management present detailed plans for improving the management of beneficiary information and cash-based transfers at the Board's 2021 second regular session. The persistence of serious risks in respect of cash-based transfers, SCOPE and NGOs as reported by the Office of the Inspector General was noted.
 220. The acting Inspector General clarified that gender mainstreaming was assessed through means such as the prioritization of women's participation in decision making, the systematic recruitment of women and country office participation in training on gender transformative approaches. Gender issues would be reviewed thoroughly in 2022.
 221. Regarding food diversion, a proactive integrity review on the management of commodities was planned for 2021 and would examine fraud prevention. Beneficiary information and cash-based transfer management processes had been improved, particularly through the introduction of reconciliation, although implementation was not yet complete. More details on those matters could be provided at the briefing on oversight to be held in July 2021.
 222. WFP had investigated the fraud scheme identified in the proactive integrity review on cash-based transfers and had shared its findings in a lessons-learned report issued in January 2021. The case illustrated the powerful complementarity of the audit and investigative functions in combatting fraud.
 223. The Office of Inspections and Investigations reported that while increased resources had reduced pressure, demand continued to outstrip the capacity of the unit. More investigations had been completed in 2020 thanks to improved intake processes, which separated cases that warranted investigation from others that could be resolved through other means; increased collaboration with United Nations partners and external groups had brought greater flexibility and helped overcome access constraints in highly insecure areas.
 224. Management highlighted improvements in risk assessment processes, including the release of a fraud prevention handbook, fraud prevention training and the identification of minimum control standards for managing third-party risk in emergency settings. Emergency processes and procedures were being reviewed in coordination with WFP divisions. SCOPE had performed well during the COVID-19 crisis, enabling WFP to distribute safely more than USD 1.3 billion in cash-based transfers (USD 1.5 billion including in-kind transfers), aimed at assisting more than 14.7 million beneficiaries across 44 countries (20.2 million beneficiaries across 47 countries when including in-kind transfers). The Technology Division was seeking to adjust some tools to ensure they met WFP's needs without loss of data or a proliferation of platforms. A beneficiary management function was being set up within the Programme and Policy Development Department that would lead on that cross-functional area of WFP's work and would

feed into work related to SCOPE and other systems. That would be discussed in greater detail at the current session under agenda item 6 g), on the External Auditor's report on WFP's management of beneficiary information.

2021/EB.A/14 Management review of significant risk and control issues, 2020

225. Management presented the report on its review of significant risk and control issues for 2020, summarizing its analysis of the key risks faced by WFP in the previous year. Significant progress had been made in the areas of monitoring, emergency scale-up and food safety and quality; work was under way to improve NGO management, talent management and workforce planning, workplace culture and beneficiary management and information technology solutions.
226. Board members welcomed the comprehensive report and the careful analysis captured therein of the various risks the organization was facing and commended WFP for ensuring continued controls and risk mitigation despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. They concurred that there was a need for continual improvement in WFP's overall control environment, in particular in the areas of workforce planning, including expansion of the Future International Talent pool, beneficiary management and NGO management as it related to fraud prevention.
227. Speaking on behalf of his list, one Board member encouraged WFP to take a global, systemic approach to issues such as improving workplace culture and staff retention, combatting racism and all forms of misconduct, preventing fraud and reducing risks related to NGO management.
228. One Board member called on WFP to conduct a comprehensive review of its implementation of the Performance and Competency Enhancement tool and welcomed management's expansion of the system to more staff categories. Another underscored the importance of minimizing food and cash assistance losses. He urged WFP to investigate every reported loss and to introduce new tools for reducing losses, adding that the self-insurance scheme should not be the sole tool but rather the last resort. He requested details regarding the amount of cash-based transfer losses and how WFP safeguarded its systems from abuse.
229. Describing the Technology Division as under-resourced, one Board member sought details of WFP cybersecurity contingency plans and risk reduction measures. Another said that there were persistent serious risks in the management of SCOPE and cash-based transfers despite significant investment in those areas.
230. Board members asked when the final draft of the new leadership framework would be ready and how WFP could transform transactional relationships with NGOs into real partnerships. One member urged WFP to speed up the implementation of the local and regional food procurement policy. Another called on WFP to address gaps in partner capacity, especially in remote areas.
231. Management confirmed that cash-based transfer losses were tracked and that investigations concerning significant losses were under way. WFP had a comprehensive cash-based transfer assurance framework with additional guidance customized by region; the majority of cash-based transfer risk exposure was related to financial service providers and cooperating partners; hence, cash-based transfers were a priority under the management oversight project aimed at simplifying and focusing regional bureau oversight.
232. WFP continued to strive for improvement in leadership through the comprehensive action plan for the implementation of the recommendations of the joint Board/management working group on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power and discrimination, the people policy and new training programmes for supervisors and country office managers. The new leadership framework was due to be finalized in September 2021, following internal consultation. Significant progress had been made in workforce planning under the leadership of the Workforce

Planning and Strategy Branch, which had completed functional reviews for finance and partnerships and was beginning those for supply chains, cash-based transfers and nutrition. The Future International Talent pool had 1,053 pre-selected candidates ready for deployment.

233. Cybersecurity had been greatly strengthened since 2017 through investments in people (e.g., mandatory training and information technology literacy exercises), processes and technology (e.g., upgrading network management and threat detection capability) and remained an area of continued focus for WFP. Significant progress had also been made in governance in terms of architecture and aligning technology with business needs.
234. As part of recent work to strengthen partnerships with NGOs, local and international organizations had been involved in three consultations on the new strategic plan and a Board event on peacebuilding. Corporate tools and processes for managing cooperating partners more efficiently had been introduced at the country office level. WFP recognized potential challenges in local NGO capacity but said that it was necessary to balance effectiveness, efficiency, capacity building and risk.
235. Management confirmed that the Deputy Director, Supply Chain Operations Division, would address questions related to local and regional procurement during the current session under agenda item 10 f), on food procurement.

2021/EB.A/15 Audited annual accounts, 2020

236. Management presented WFP's audited annual accounts for 2020, which had been prepared in accordance with the International Public Sector Accounting Standards and had received an unqualified audit opinion. Section I of the document comprised an audit opinion and audit report from the External Auditor, while section II contained the Executive Director's statement, a statement on internal control and the financial statements with their related notes. Management had accepted all seven of the recommendations issued by the External Auditor.
237. Despite the pandemic, WFP's overall financial performance and financial position were very strong in 2020, with growth in revenue of 8 percent, in expenses of 6 percent and in net assets of 17 percent. Revenue was recognized on the signing of contribution pledges – unless stipulated for use in future years – and expenses when transfers were delivered to implementing partners and beneficiaries.
238. The representative of the External Auditor praised WFP's efficiency in mobilizing resources throughout a challenging year. Pandemic-related restrictions on travel had affected the work of his office, forcing it to carry out checks on country offices by virtual means and to rely on visual observations as audit proof for certain elements of its work, including food distribution and stock verification. However, he said, he was confident that the constraints had not undermined the relevance of his office's findings. He confirmed the External Auditor's unqualified opinion on the financial statements, said that the COVID-19 pandemic had not had any major effects on WFP's financial situation and expressed satisfaction with management's response to the recommendations put forward by his office.
239. Board members, one of whom spoke on behalf of a list, welcomed the unqualified audit opinion and strong financial position of WFP as confirmed by the External Auditor. Expressing satisfaction with the large share of resources allocated to emergency response, members encouraged WFP to continue its efforts to raise funds for sustainable development initiatives aimed at helping developing countries to overcome the dramatic economic effects of the pandemic.
240. One member expressed support for all of the External Auditor's recommendations, particularly those pertaining to the inclusion of a summary implementation plan in the annual management plan, the updating of WFP's finance manual and the finalization of a security policy and operational procedures for WINGS. The member also asked how management planned to ensure the monitoring of controls and the timely updating of manuals and procedures in the future.

241. Management said that a global implementation plan broken down by strategic result, focus area, region and activity would be included in the WFP management plan for 2022, which was currently being prepared. Details on implementation at the country level were provided in the CSP data portal. Following a delay caused by the pandemic in 2020, an updated finance manual would be issued in the third quarter of 2021, accompanied by an Executive Director's circular directing the Corporate Finance Division to keep the manual up to date. The updated manual would incorporate a consolidated version of the various guidelines related to the Integrated Road Map that had been issued since 2018. Updated financial rules would be presented for information at the Board's 2021 second regular session, while financial management oversight was performed via regional finance officers. Policy guidance regarding access rights to WINGS would be issued once ongoing system improvements had been completed; the guidance had been delayed in order to ensure its alignment with those improvements.

2021/EB.A/16 Report of the External Auditor on critical corporate initiatives and WFP management response to the External Auditor's recommendations

242. The representative of the External Auditor presented his office's report on CCIs, which included recommendations related to the selection framework for CCIs and other investment initiatives; fiscal governance in respect of CCIs; the need for standardized instruments for measuring the results of CCIs; the funding framework for CCIs; and greater involvement of country offices in the preparation of CCIs.
243. Management said that before the report was issued WFP had already identified many of the issues raised by the External Auditor. Reviews and improvements that were under way included BUSBE, which had been launched in early 2020 and was aligned with many of the report's recommendations.
244. Praising the External Auditor for the quality and clarity of the report, members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, welcomed its findings and recommendations, which echoed many of their own requests for greater engagement in the preparation, monitoring and oversight of CCIs. They expressed satisfaction with management's response to the report and called for full and timely implementation of all the recommended actions, while acknowledging that BUSBE and other recent initiatives were already contributing to the desired outcomes.
245. In particular, members asked that future annual performance reports include detailed concept notes outlining each initiative's objectives, activities, outcomes and budget allocation. They welcomed management's commitment to tracking and reporting on performance indicators for each CCI.
246. Board members requested more information on the funding of non-recurring investments through reallocations of available PSA funds, including the total amounts allocated in this way to CCIs; management's intentions regarding the recommended actions in respect of fiscal governance, financial management and performance monitoring; and the relationship between procedures introduced under BUSBE and implementation of the External Auditor's recommendations, particularly with regard to the Board's oversight of innovative administrative expenditures. One member recommended investigating the possibility of funding certain CCIs through means other than the PSA equalization account.
247. The representative of the External Auditor said that he agreed with that recommendation, while management reiterated its commitment to timely implementation of all the recommendations. Responding to some of the questions raised, management undertook to provide more detailed information on CCIs when presenting them to the Board for approval and to include specific decision points on each CCI in draft decisions presented in future management plans or other documents. Recommended actions to which BUSBE contributed included those regarding fiscal

governance, the engagement of field offices in CCI design, the updating of CCIs and financial management.

2021/EB.A/17 Report of the External Auditor on the management of information on beneficiaries and WFP management response to the External Auditor's recommendations

248. The External Auditor presented the report on WFP's management of beneficiary information, which called for improvement, particularly in how WFP reported beneficiary numbers. Other issues included the usefulness of data collected, the integration of information systems and governance processes.
249. Management welcomed the report, saying that it provided valuable insight into systemic issues that affected data quality and the coordination and use of beneficiary information. WFP was committed to implementing the External Auditor's recommendations, including through better communication on beneficiary numbers; increased interoperability between its SCOPE and country office tool for managing effectively (COMET) systems and local data tools; and a comprehensive review of beneficiary information management across the programme cycle, led by a multi-stakeholder steering committee.
250. Board members praised the clarity and quality of the External Auditor's report. They welcomed management's work to date to develop a central coordination mechanism and an ecosystem of digital tools for beneficiary data management. Several members said there was a need to improve the evaluation of cooperating partners, address gaps in cooperating partner data management and ensure that effective beneficiary feedback mechanisms were in place. Others sought clarification of the methods used to estimate indirect beneficiary numbers, capture the duration of support provided and gauge the extent of support received by individual beneficiaries.
251. Speaking on behalf of his list, one Board member urged WFP to reduce the margin of error in beneficiary figures reported by country offices, harmonize beneficiary data management tools and reduce double counting. He welcomed the recommendation to strengthen the assessment of cooperating partner performance and underscored the importance of the impartiality of partners, particularly those involved in assistance distribution and data collection.
252. One Board member called on WFP to ensure that its commitment to harmonizing digital tools including SCOPE and COMET was reflected in the next multi-year information systems strategy. She also requested donor access to the COMET dashboard and the inclusion of information on data quality in donor reports.
253. Board members asked management to indicate which reports would contain information on data quality and to share details of the current targeting strategy, given concerns related to the effective targeting of those most vulnerable. One member asked whether it was useful to continue to provide estimates of indirect beneficiaries given the difficulty of the task and the disparity between the approaches adopted by different country offices.
254. Management reiterated its commitment to strengthening corporate coordination mechanisms for beneficiary information management. The ten criteria on data quality put forward by the External Auditor would be taken on board and guidance produced to improve consistency; however, it was too early to say which reports would contain data quality information. Efforts to standardize beneficiary targeting and selection approaches were under way and aspects of vulnerability such as disability and membership of marginalized indigenous or language groups would also be included.
255. Management welcomed Board members' support for the ecosystem approach to beneficiary management tools, noting that it would encompass relevant platforms used by other agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization

for Migration, to which interoperability with WFP tools could be extended if certain standards were met.

256. Management took note of member calls to strengthen NGO management, adding that through work on COMET and the Partner Connect platform, WFP sought to achieve standardization and streamline data sharing; that was also an opportunity to build partner capacity. Attention would be paid to the issue of partner impartiality.
257. A senior statistician had been hired to draft a methodological note for the annual performance reports and annual country reports as recommended by the External Auditor. Initial guidelines on how to estimate tier 2 and 3 beneficiaries had been developed and would be tested. Donors already had access to COMET data through the CSP data portal and access to the visualization of COMET data, for example, through the annual performance report dashboard.
258. Management noted that the integration of SCOPE and COMET had already begun and that a pilot was being implemented in the Iraq country office. It would be ready by the end of 2021 and would deliver better information on planned and actual beneficiaries.
259. Management also assured the Board that the leadership group was very engaged on the issue and was committed to tackling the systemic issues highlighted in the External Auditor's report.

2021/EB.A/18 Report on the implementation of the External Auditor's recommendations

260. The Chief Risk Officer presented the report on the implementation of the External Auditor's recommendations, which was a revised version dated 14 June 2021, updated to reflect additional progress made in implementing eight additional recommendations of the External Auditor since the report was originally issued on 21 May. In addition to the 31 recommendations indicated in the report as closed since the 2020 annual session of the Board, representing a 55 percent closure rate, which exceeded the average closure rate of 52 percent for the past quinquennium despite COVID-19-related restrictions, three recommendations had been submitted to the External Auditor for validation, which if confirmed would bring the recommendation implementation rate to 61 percent.
261. Members expressed appreciation for the efforts made by management to implement the External Auditor's recommendations and encouraged it to take the steps required to close the remaining outstanding recommendations in a timely manner, highlighting those relating to food losses, including strengthened vendor management and quality assurance systems, fraud, real estate, air transport services, decentralization and improved regional bureau oversight as being of particular concern.
262. One member, recalling that a number of audit observations and recommendations had been made in connection with the failure to update or finalize the finance management manual and the WFP Information Network and Global System (WINGS) security policy, asked about measures to ensure that guidance manuals and procedures in general were kept current and whether WFP had taken action based on the recommendations to ensure that its manuals and guidance materials were up to date.
263. The Chief Risk Officer indicated that there was momentum on all open issues, with older recommendations related to human resources, food losses and enhanced due diligence on supplier anti-fraud and anti-corruption capabilities expected to be closed later in the year. Three of the five outstanding real estate issues had been sent to the External Auditor for closure, with the remaining two contingent on post-COVID-19 work arrangements that had yet to be finalized. Six of 16 recommendations relating to air services had been resolved in a busy year, and substantial work had been done on fraud and ineligible passengers, including a fraud risk assessment.

264. With regard to the 2017 decentralization audit issue, the Chief Risk Officer reported that management had in April 2021 launched a project for management oversight under which he chaired a steering group that had established core principles for regional bureau oversight. The project aimed to review five key functional areas in 2021, with more areas planned in 2022. The project was a simplification and focus exercise that was expected to produce smarter controls and better second-line review. With regard to updating procedures, he committed to having the Enterprise Risk Management Division compile an inventory of existing procedures and determine whether they were up to date but added that updating manuals was a core second-line responsibility of each area concerned.
265. The Chief Financial Officer added that the budget governance review had revealed that documentation, guidance and policies were not sufficiently accessible nor thematically organized, which management was currently addressing. A concerted effort was also being made to ensure that guidance and directives were kept up to date and that the appropriate governance frameworks were in place.
266. With regard to procurement and food losses, the Deputy Director, Supply Chain Operations Division, recalled that a discussion on procurement was scheduled to take place later in the session and suggested that questions on those subjects be taken up in that context.

2021/EB.A/19 Report on the utilization of WFP's advance financing mechanisms (1 January–31 December 2020)

267. Presenting the report on the utilization of WFP's advance financing mechanisms, the Deputy Director, Corporate Planning and Performance Division, described how the mechanisms, notably the Global Commodity Management Facility (GCMF), had proved their value throughout 2020 in improving WFP's efficiency and enabling the organization to reach those most in need in a timely fashion and make the best use of available and expected contributions. She drew attention to the request to increase the GCMF ceiling by USD 100 million to USD 660 million to enable WFP to respond to a rapidly changing operational environment, increase food purchase service provision, expand GCMF regional supply lines supporting emergency operations, mitigate risks such as uncertainty regarding border closures and implement a long-term global strategy for specialized nutritious food outreach.
268. Members thanked management for the report, saying that the value of the advance financing mechanisms had been proven and expressing support for the GCMF ceiling increase. One member, speaking on behalf of a list, asked that a portion of the increase be allocated to procurement from local smallholder farmers. Another observed that, once increased, the ceiling would be 11 times its original amount and that better policy decisions might have pre-empted the need for the increase. A third said that the benefits produced by the mechanisms could be achieved by a greater proportion of flexible unearmarked or softly earmarked funding and urged caution in relying on such mechanisms, arguing that they were not substitutes for flexible funding and could act as a disincentive for donors to provide such funding.
269. Responding, the Deputy Director said that WFP did not have a cap on the amount available for local purchases. The USD 20 million in the GCMF currently available for them was designated for that purpose, but WFP could exceed that amount whenever demand could be met by purchasing from smallholder farmers. She also assured the Board that WFP agreed that it was necessary to increase flexible contributions and was working hard to do so.

2021/EB.A/20 Utilization of the self-insurance special account surplus

270. Management presented a proposal for transferring USD 20 million from the WFP self-insurance account to the Immediate Response Account for use in WFP's life-saving work in emergencies. A drop in food losses and successful efforts to recover losses from the parties responsible for them

had reduced to USD 47 million the amount that needed to be retained in the account, according to WFP's assessment of its likely self-insurance needs.

271. Board members expressed full support for the proposal.

Evaluation reports

2021/EB.A/21 Summary report on the peer review of the evaluation function at the World Food Programme and WFP response

272. The Director of the Evaluation Office for the United Nations Population Fund and Chair of the panel that undertook the peer review of the evaluation function at WFP presented the key findings of the peer review, which had assessed WFP's evaluation function against the United Nations Evaluation Group's norms and standards for independence, credibility and utility. The peer review had found the evaluation function to be strong overall, and the panel had formulated six recommendations for improving it further.
273. The Deputy Executive Director thanked the panel for its work and report and affirmed the importance of the review for management, which considered that the evaluation function had helped to improve the quality of WFP's programmes. The next step was about enhancing the evaluation function so that it could provide the insights and evidence needed for WFP to contribute most effectively to the achievement of all of the SDGs, including especially SDG 2.
274. Presenting the WFP response to the report, the Director of Evaluation welcomed the panel's recommendations, saying that WFP would promote adequate and sustained financing of the evaluation function, ensure appropriate skills and capacities of staff involved in evaluations and enhance organizational learning from evaluation evidence. The findings of the peer review would underpin an update of WFP's evaluation policy aimed at supporting strengthened evaluation partnerships beyond WFP in pursuit of the SDGs. It would also ensure harmonization of the evaluation function with the next WFP strategic plan.
275. Members praised the Office of Evaluation (OEV) for welcoming the findings of the peer review and its openness to further improving the evaluation function.
276. Two members said that the functional and financial independence of the Office was vital, with one adding that evaluation should be considered a baseline activity for funding purposes and recommending the establishment of clear reporting lines from the Director of Evaluation to the Executive Board on functional matters and to the Executive Director on administrative matters, including procedures for dismissal in consultation with the Executive Board.
277. One member expressed concern that a significant portion of staff and country offices viewed evaluation as a bureaucratic exercise and encouraged WFP leadership to express its full support for the evaluation function and articulate to staff the value of using evidence and lessons learned when making decisions and designing policies, strategies and programmes. She further urged management to take the steps necessary to enhance the contribution of evaluation to organizational learning, including by implementing evaluation recommendations to ensure that lessons learned could be integrated into WFP's practices and policies. Finally, she welcomed management's efforts to further mainstream gender equality, inclusion and accountability to affected people into its evaluations.
278. Another member urged OEV to ensure that it took a consistent approach to all evaluations, whether centralized or decentralized.
279. The Director of Evaluation acknowledged members' comments, particularly regarding the need for continued and strengthened independence of OEV and adequate funding, and indicated that more information on how those things would be achieved would be provided to the Executive Board at a forthcoming informal session on the updating of the evaluation policy. In updating the

policy, OEV would ensure a strong focus on utility in decision making about what would be evaluated and when and where and would reflect growing interest in regional bureaux conducting regional multi-country evaluations, headquarters divisions commissioning evaluations and, in the context of United Nations development system reform, joint evaluations.

2021/EB.A/22 Annual evaluation report for 2020 and management response

280. The Director of Evaluation presented a short video highlighting some of the main findings of the annual evaluation report. Despite the pandemic-related challenges of 2020, the WFP evaluation function had continued to improve, and the Director thanked her colleagues at headquarters and in regional bureaux and country offices for their dedication and hard work. Notable features of the work of OEV in 2020 included rapid adaptation to pandemic-related challenges, growth in partnerships and participation in joint evaluations. Priorities for 2021 included implementation of updated policies and systems, capacity strengthening for WFP evaluation personnel, increased access to qualified evaluators and partnerships for enhancing evaluation practice and promotion of the use of evaluation evidence.
281. Expressing appreciation for the work of OEV, the Deputy Director, Corporate Planning and Performance Division, said that while continued progress had been made towards fulfilling the vision of the evaluation policy there was a need for more focused attention on the use of lessons learned, knowledge management and ensuring sufficient capacity and resources for evaluation throughout WFP.
282. Board members, including two speaking on behalf of lists and one on behalf of a group of Member States, applauded OEV's flexibility in adapting and adjusting its working methods during the pandemic and welcomed its increased collaboration with partners, including in joint evaluations, development of evaluation capacity throughout WFP and greater focus on impact evaluations. They encouraged OEV to build on recent achievements, including by incorporating the remote data collection methods developed in 2020 into its regular working practices; integrating lessons learned from evaluations on cross cutting themes into the annual performance report; and using its participation in joint interagency evaluations to facilitate collective learning, including by sharing its considerable experience with evaluation approaches in complex humanitarian settings.
283. Board members urged management to complete implementation of the 44 percent of evaluation recommendations that were still outstanding. They expressed concern with regard to the cancellation of certain CSP evaluations in 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and said that the design of each second-generation CSP should be informed by an evaluation of the corresponding first-generation CSP. Board members requested additional information on the use of lessons learned from evaluations; the adequacy of the resources allocated to the evaluation function in 2020; the small number of decentralized evaluations covering emergency response activities; and the recent launch of the R2 risk and recommendation tracking system.
284. The Director of Evaluation committed to providing the information requested in future annual evaluation reports and outlined plans for increasing the use of evaluation evidence, including through a new series of evaluation follow-up reports that would examine groups of evaluations and trace how effectively evaluation evidence was being used by management. Sufficient resources had been allocated to evaluation for 2021, but a significant increase would be necessary in 2022 to cover the increased work plan. The target of dedicating 0.8 percent of WFP's total contribution revenue to the evaluation function had proved overambitious, and an alternative target would be discussed at the informal consultation on evaluation to be held in July 2021.
285. The Deputy Director of Evaluation said that when it was not possible to conduct a CSP evaluation in time to inform the design of a new CSP, evidence was gathered from other CSP or global

evaluations addressing similar issues. The updated evaluation policy would have a specific objective of making evaluation evidence more systematically accessible, both to stakeholders in WFP and externally.

286. The Deputy Director, Corporate Planning and Performance Division, said that the comparatively low completion rate of 56 percent of recommendations implemented was partly due to the adoption of a more robust metric for determining when recommendations had been completely implemented, whereas the previous measurement had tracked completion of recommended actions articulated under each recommendation. The more holistic approach of tracking completed evaluation recommendations was viewed as more robust and reflective of the aim of each evaluation. Management was examining possible reasons for the relatively limited use of evaluation lessons at WFP.

2021/EB.A/23 Summary report on the strategic evaluation of the contribution of school feeding activities to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and management response

287. The Director of Evaluation presented the summary report on the strategic evaluation of the contribution of school feeding activities to the achievement of the SDGs, which had found evidence of the multidimensional effectiveness of school feeding. The study recommended that WFP invest in organizational readiness by updating its school feeding policy and strengthening implementation of the school feeding strategy, particularly with regard to partnerships, resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation and cross-cutting dimensions such as gender.
288. Management reaffirmed WFP's commitment to delivering on the transformative ambitions of WFP's school feeding strategy and taking a global leadership role on the subject. It welcomed the findings and recommendations of the strategic evaluation, saying that they would inform the development of the new strategic plan and ongoing work to update guidance on school feeding in humanitarian settings. They agreed with all the recommendations but highlighted concerns related to the feasibility of the timeframes proposed for certain actions.
289. Board members underscored the crucial role of school feeding programmes in national strategies to address food insecurity, malnutrition, poverty and social inequality and in efforts to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. They applauded WFP's leadership role and praised its agility in adapting school feeding operations to school closures in 2020.
290. Speaking on behalf of his list, one Board member encouraged WFP to learn from national experiences with school feeding. He asked how WFP planned to increase school meal funding and capacity. Another Board member, speaking on behalf of his list, welcomed WFP collaboration with other United Nations agencies on school feeding initiatives and noted the clear contribution of local initiatives to the achievement of seven SDGs. He asked for regular updates on school feeding in order to secure political and financial support and called on WFP to use locally grown produce as much as possible in school feeding programmes.
291. Several members voiced strong support for the school feeding coalition and hoped it would feature prominently during the food systems summit. One Board member called on WFP to increase its capacity related to school feeding in humanitarian settings and in the aftermath of shocks; another asked how many WFP school feeding programmes were implemented in challenging settings. Several Board members urged WFP to ensure that school feeding played a key role in the new strategic plan.
292. One Board member noted his country's keen interest in working on national school feeding with WFP and exchanging experiences with other countries on the issue.
293. The Director of the School-based Programmes Division noted that WFP efforts to strengthen school feeding capacity were set out in its ten-year strategy and centred around increased research and evidence for country-level decision making; the creation of a corporate fundraising

strategy for school meals and a financing task force; and expanded guidance on humanitarian contexts covering protection, gender and targeting issues. She added that around 30 percent of the WFP school feeding portfolio was in fragile or humanitarian settings.

294. She paid tribute to the Member States who had played a key role in setting up and promoting the school feeding coalition, adding that WFP was engaging with the Deputy Secretary-General and the special envoy for the food systems summit to brief them on the coalition and the multidimensional effects of school feeding programmes.

2021/EB.A/24 Synthesis of evidence and lessons on country capacity strengthening from decentralized evaluations and management response

295. The Deputy Director of Evaluation presented the synthesis of evidence and lessons on country capacity strengthening (CCS) from decentralized evaluations and management response, which had found that CCS was integral to WFP interventions and, when fully implemented, improved programme results. The report contained five recommendations on matters such as monitoring and evaluation, funding, capacity needs assessment and the integration of cross-cutting issues.
296. Management welcomed the report, expressing full agreement with the recommendations and noting that since 2019 WFP had made considerable investments in CCS, including through a new dedicated unit at headquarters; that CCS indicators had been integrated into the corporate results framework; that a gender transformative approach was used in the capacity needs assessment tool; and that extensive guidance had been produced. Management recognized that there was a need for further progress, particularly in respect of partnerships with other development actors, funding and monitoring.
297. One Board member welcomed the finding that CCS activities could produce long-term capacity change across regions and programmes but highlighted shortcomings related to the definition, approach, measurement, funding and staffing of WFP capacity development. He said that efforts to increase the transformative impact of WFP operations should be reflected in the new strategic plan and new policies on CCS, social protection and resilience. He encouraged WFP to align the revised indicators with the new strategic plan and corporate results framework and called for stronger cooperation with partners, particularly on joint needs and capacity assessment.
298. One Board member called on WFP to address the lack of good quality monitoring and evaluation data, which made it difficult to draw evidence-based conclusions related to CCS. She also urged WFP to prioritize partnerships in the new strategic plan. Another member noted a lack of progress in improving WFP's CCS capacity despite the creation of the CCS unit. She asked how management planned to ensure that CCS expertise was strengthened in all regions.
299. The Director, Programme – Humanitarian and Development Division, welcomed Board support for improving CCS capacity. He confirmed that management was focused on improving monitoring and evaluation in consultation with other development actors. Substantial extrabudgetary investments in CCS had been made over the past two years—whereas the evaluation synthesis covered the 2016–2019 period—reflecting demand and management commitment to improvement in the area. Ad hoc funding was being used to improve regional capacity, and WFP was upgrading its training, bringing in partners and reinforcing a more standardized approach. He said that there was a need to engage in joint action with partners and observed that issues related to definitions, staffing and approaches to CCS would be addressed in the near future through strategic and budgetary decisions.

2021/EB.A/25 Implementation status of evaluation recommendations

300. The Deputy Director, Corporate Planning and Performance Division, reiterated management's commitment to full implementation of evaluation recommendations and its prioritization of internal funding requests that referred to any kind of oversight recommendation. Overall, 56 percent of the 198 evaluation recommendations due in 2020 had been implemented by the

end of 2020, with figures for the various types of evaluations ranging from 74 percent of recommendations from CSP evaluations to 25 percent for emergency and policy evaluations. The low completion rate was partly explained by a change in the KPI metric used, which as revised measured full implementation of entire recommendations rather than completion of individual recommended actions. As a result, comparisons with previous years could not be made. The R2 risk and recommendation tracking tool rolled out in January would help improve the tracking and implementation of recommendations.

301. Board members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, urged management to continue its efforts to improve the implementation of evaluation recommendations and the use of evaluation evidence, which they said informed decision making, improved corporate effectiveness and enhanced organizational learning and accountability to stakeholders. They welcomed the R2 platform and looked forward to future updates on its use and effectiveness.
302. One Board member voiced concern with regard to the steady decline in the percentage of recommendations implemented, falling from 81 percent in 2018 to 64 percent in 2019 and 56 percent in 2020, and requested more details on the recommendations that remained open and management's plans for implementing them.
303. The Deputy Director took note of the Board members' requests for improving the clarity of the information provided in the report and said that Board members could be given access to the information on the R2 platform. In response to a specific question she said that only the Regional Bureau for Eastern Africa had achieved 100 percent implementation of evaluation recommendations. Thanking Board members for their support she said that she would provide any additional information requested in bilateral meetings.
304. The Director of Evaluation outlined some of the activities that OEV and management planned to carry out to strengthen the use of evaluation learning and the implementation of evaluation recommendations.

Other business (continued)

Update on the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service

305. The Chief of the WFP Aviation Service briefed the Board on UNHAS operations in 2020, its financial situation and its performance in terms of cost-efficiency, environmental impact and user satisfaction. He highlighted severe funding shortfalls for operations in the Syrian Arab Republic, Libya, the Central African Republic and Guinea; funding was forecast to end in August for a further five country operations. WFP was seeking to improve funding sustainability by developing a UNHAS fundraising strategy, including multi-year planning for donor funding commitments.
306. Speaking on behalf of her list, one Board member commended WFP for the crucial role played by UNHAS in the global response to COVID-19. She encouraged WFP to continue to work with NGOs and implementing partners in the design and implementation of UNHAS operations, adding that annual exit assessments were needed to ensure that operations were ceased when transport alternatives became available.
307. She urged WFP to improve funding sustainability through a uniform and systematic approach to cost recovery and fundraising and the creation of a flexible reserve to support the scale-up of emergency responses; provisions for multi-year funding should also be explored.
308. She called on WFP to deliver regular updates on UNHAS with clearer information on costs, prioritization, efficiency, performance and environmental impact. She also requested more information on the implementation of audit recommendations, including timelines and mechanisms for Member State involvement, and an explanation of the relatively low rates of passenger satisfaction in Kenya and the Syrian Arab Republic.

309. One other Board member reiterated his country's support for UNHAS and underscored the importance of working with NGOs in the design and implementation of air activities.
310. The Chief of the Aviation Service reported that a preliminary draft policy framework had been developed in response to the External Auditor's recommendations; the Board would be included in discussions on the draft policy and a firm timeline would be shared at a later stage. The recommendation on reporting greenhouse gas emissions had been closed, but management noted the request to provide more detail on cost prioritization, performance and environmental impact in future updates.
311. WFP was analysing the reasons behind the poor passenger satisfaction rates and response rates seen in certain countries; any actions taken in response would be shared with the Board.

Administrative and managerial matters (continued)

2021/EB.A/26 Appointment of two members to the Audit Committee

312. Introducing the item, Ms Elizabeth Petrovski, Alternate Permanent Representative of the United States of America, who had acted as Chair of the selection panel for the selection of two candidates to be appointed as members of the Audit Committee to replace members whose terms would end in November 2021, outlined the selection process and presented the two top candidates, Mr Darshak Shah (Kenya) and Mr Veerathai Santiprabhob (Thailand). She also informed the Board that, in recognition of the high quality of other shortlisted candidates, the panel suggested that the next recommended candidate on the shortlist, a woman from the List C region, be considered for the next vacancy on the Audit Committee, expected to open up in November 2022.
313. A member speaking on behalf of a list congratulated the selected candidates, commended the Chair and the members of the selection panel on the transparency and inclusiveness of the selection process and thanked the Secretariat for its work in shortlisting the candidates and organizing the process.
314. In response to a question from a member the Secretary to the Executive Board said that the Board would have to approve the consideration of the List C shortlisted candidate for the next vacancy on the Audit Committee as proposed by the selection panel, failing which a new selection process would have to be initiated.

2021/EB.A/27 Appointment of the Inspector General and Director of Oversight Office

315. The Deputy Executive Director outlined the process for the selection of the new Inspector General and Director of the Oversight Office and presented Ms Fabienne Lambert, currently the Director of the Office of Audit and Investigation Services for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in New York, as the candidate recommended by the selection panel.
316. Several Board members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, took the floor to thank the selection panel for its work and express their support for the appointment of Ms Lambert. Two members stressed the key nature of the position of Inspector General, with one highlighting the need for functional independence and the other voicing an expectation that transparency and responsiveness would be as robust under the new Inspector General as it had been under the previous incumbent. One member also expressed satisfaction with the number and quality of candidacies for the post, saying that it was an indication of WFP's reputation for excellence. Members also expressed appreciation for the performance of the previous Inspector General as well as that of the acting Inspector General currently performing the function.
317. The Deputy Executive Director observed that the Board member on the panel had been very clear with each candidate during the interview process regarding the independence of the role and reporting to the Board. Ms Lambert had explained her relationship with the Board of UNFPA,

which was very similar, and he was confident that members could expect oversight to remain as steady, independent and informative as it had always been.

2021/EB.A/28 Report of the Joint Inspection Unit: Multilingualism in the United Nations system

318. As requested by members during the 2021 first regular session of the Executive Board, the Chief Risk Officer presented an update on the implementation of the recommendations made by the Joint Inspection Unit in its review of multilingualism in the United Nations system, noting that WFP accepted all the recommendations with the exception of the one calling for the appointment of a single senior coordinator. This recommendation was partially accepted given that multilingualism was already well embedded in various functions and that WFP was committed to working with the United Nations system-wide Under-Secretary-General coordinator.
319. Several members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, thanked management for its response to their request and reiterated the primary importance of multilingualism for the United Nations, citing a range of reasons, including the role of multilingualism in harmonizing countries' efforts towards a common goal, promoting democratization, enhancing participation and improving the quality of dialogue and cooperation.
320. One member, speaking on behalf of a list, commended the efforts of the team led by the Secretary to the Board and encouraged WFP to work to improve communication and promote the participation of all members. She also acknowledged the interpreters for their contribution and urged WFP to increase investment in interpretation and document translation for meetings, including at the regional level. Supported by another member, she called for multilingualism to be slated for discussion at the next meeting of the Rome-based agencies.
321. Two members noted with appreciation the commitment to multilingualism in the new WFP people policy and, along with a third member speaking on behalf of a list, called for the development of indicators for tracking performance.
322. Two members, including one speaking on behalf of a list, urged management to reconsider its decision to accept only partially the Joint Inspection Unit's recommendation calling for the appointment of a single senior official as multilingualism coordinator.
323. The Chief Risk Officer, the Director, Human Resources Division, the Secretary to the Executive Board, the Deputy Executive Director and the Assistant Executive Director, Workplace Culture Department, all took the floor to underscore the importance of multilingualism at WFP. The Chief Risk Officer said that WFP had in place practices to promote multilingualism for its 20,000 staff members, with all major e-learning courses available in at least four languages and the Rosetta Stone application available to professional staff for free. Recognizing that the promotion of multilingualism was an ongoing process, WFP had a strict second language requirement on recruitment, for which waivers were granted rarely and only on a temporary basis. The Director of the Human Resources Division added that WFP already tracked the language proficiency of its workforce through indicators, including activities relating to multilingualism, while the Secretary to the Executive Board took note of the request to ensure greater multilingualism in more informal meetings and undertook to identify opportunities in that regard and to take the issue up with his counterparts at the other Rome-based agencies when planning their next intergovernmental meeting. The Deputy Executive Director thanked the members for their input and acknowledged the interpreters' contribution. The Assistant Executive Director, Workplace Culture Department, confirmed that the people policy set out a commitment to actively promote multilingualism and clearly stated that WFP would have initiatives to develop a multicultural and multilingual workforce, and she reassured the

Board that the aforementioned coordination unit in her department would give special attention to multilingualism.

Update on food procurement

324. The Chief of the Procurement Division gave an overview of 2020 activities and efficiency gains, highlighting reduced lead times, increased purchasing from smallholder farmers, cost savings and a scale-up in service provision to governments. She noted the key role played by the GCMF, particularly in ensuring operational efficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic.
325. Several Board members welcomed what they said was progress in reducing the environmental impact of procurement, cutting lead times and scaling up operations where needed. One Board member encouraged WFP to prioritize sustainability, including through the use of environmentally friendly packaging and commodities such as certified sustainable palm oil. She also underscored the importance of supporting smallholder farmers, for example through capacity building and improvement of infrastructure.
326. One Board member remarked that WFP was well placed to foster more equitable and resilient supply chains through the full implementation of the local and regional procurement policy. She asked management to outline the next steps and timeframe for the implementation of the policy. She also encouraged WFP to seek the most effective ways of using procurement to improve the lives of smallholder farmers, saying that local purchases could also reduce the environmental impact of WFP procurement and increase the availability of fresh and nutritious food for entire communities.
327. One Board member asked how WFP engaged with governments for service provision and the impact of that work on governments' capacity. Another member requested details of efficiency gains associated with GCMF procurement compared with those of conventional procurement and how they could be leveraged to deal with cost fluctuation. She also asked whether WFP had considered sourcing sustainable rice and whether packaging was collected and reused; she requested an update on efforts to seek alternatives to plastic bags and on how WFP had strengthened its oversight of procurement and food systems.
328. Another Board member asked how rising global food prices would affect WFP procurement. He also asked why it was difficult for WFP to find alternative suppliers of specialized nutritious food. Another Board member welcomed recent bilateral discussions between his government and small-scale producers on opportunities for the latter to supply WFP operations.
329. The Deputy Director of the Supply Chain Operations Division assured the Board of WFP's commitment to supporting local economies through local and regional procurement. WFP was bringing in new contract modalities, measures to prevent country-level food losses, crop calendars for purchase planning and a food procurement plan covering 12 African countries. Implementation of the local and regional procurement policy had begun, but progress had been hampered by COVID-19 restrictions. Management offered to provide more details on implementation steps and progress at the Board's 2021 second regular session or at an informal briefing.
330. Work was under way to assess the impact of local procurement on local economies, including through service provision. WFP was also reviewing its current business model and risk analysis. The Supply Chain Operations Division was building a coalition with governments and private sector entities to prepare for the food systems summit and was working with partners to improve sustainable packaging.
331. WFP currently engaged in service provision on demand but hoped to approach governments in the future with clear entry and exit plans that saw WFP acting as a bridge until governments were able to take over procurement operations. The coalition referred to above would play a key role in achieving that ambition.

332. As part of efforts to prevent food losses, WFP had released an automated food incident reporting tool; feasibility studies had been conducted for real-time, farm-to-fork tracking, and funding for such a system had been secured. Industry waste reduction standards would also be adopted, and a lean management approach would be used to decrease storage times where possible. Smallholder capacity strengthening covered post-harvest management, optimal storage practices and equipment for reducing post-harvest losses and ensuring food quality.
333. WFP applied various solutions to overcome procurement challenges related to price rises and availability issues, for example commodity substitution, the increased use of market intelligence (to anticipate gaps and identify when and where to purchase), optimized use of the GCMF (also thanks to the increase in the corporate envelope recently approved by the Board) and long-term contracts (to secure lower prices).
334. Specialized nutritious foods were not widely produced because there was little commercial demand for them and production required a large initial investment. However, in 2020 WFP had signed agreements with producers in Europe, Asia and the Middle East; a factory in Ghana had opened in early 2021 and an expression of interest process had been launched in Ethiopia in order to identify new suppliers.
335. In response to management's comments, one Board member asked that updates on procurement be included in the programme of work of the Executive Board.

Policy issues (continued)

Update on WFP's response to HIV and AIDS

336. The acting Director, Nutrition Division, updated the Board on WFP's efforts to support people living with HIV and tuberculosis, whose vulnerability had been greatly exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19. In 2020, WFP had assisted over half a million people living with HIV and tuberculosis and their families with food and nutrition support, including in emergency and fragile settings. In line with its saving lives, changing lives mandate, WFP was working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on HIV in emergencies and humanitarian crises and with the International Labour Organization on strengthening HIV-sensitive social protection.
337. WFP support for individual mothers and food-insecure households with orphans and vulnerable children had improved nutrition and adherence to life-saving HIV treatment regimens for over 420,000 people living with HIV, with more than 99 percent of at-risk infants born HIV-negative.
338. An evaluation of the 2010 HIV policy would start in June 2021, alongside the evaluation of the nutrition policy. WFP would ensure that the principles of food and nutrition support for the most vulnerable, leaving no one behind and the strategic optimization of partnerships were mainstreamed into HIV work in order to support governments' efforts to achieve their own goals to combat HIV and ensure integration into national social protection systems where appropriate.
339. Speaking on behalf of her list, one Board member commended WFP for its commitment to supporting people living with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis and its efforts to strengthen the global response to HIV and AIDS, especially in the context of the pandemic.
340. She remarked that it was important to ensure that food and nutrition support were integrated into HIV/AIDS responses in order to support treatment adherence and improve nutrition as well as reduce food insecurity. She added that the support provided by WFP had a preventive impact on vulnerable populations by reducing high-risk behaviours that could increase the transmission of HIV and TB.

341. She endorsed the joint HIV and AIDS response provided by all the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) co-sponsors and encouraged WFP to strengthen its work within the framework of the UNAIDS work programme for 2020–2021 and the UNAIDS strategy for 2021–2026.
342. The Director reassured Board members that WFP was actively supporting the UNAIDS strategy and the rollout of the UNAIDS unified budget, results and accountability framework.

Other business (continued)

Oral report on the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP

343. The President of the Board presented a brief summary of some of the discussions that had taken place at the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNFPA, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and WFP on 27 May 2021. The meeting was attended by members of the Executive Boards of the six entities and their principals or the principals' representatives. The Deputy Executive Director had attended on behalf of the WFP Executive Director.
344. The theme of the meeting was the quadrennial comprehensive policy review and the reform of the United Nations development system in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.
345. After the President had introduced the theme, a discussion had been held on lessons learned from the COVID-19 response and the way forward for a sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery. Examples from the country level had been shared, along with joint approaches including 119 socioeconomic response plans covering 137 countries. The President had outlined the devastating health, social and economic consequences of the pandemic and had called for greater unity and cohesiveness across the United Nations development system.
346. In his presentation, the Deputy Executive Director had stressed the importance of coordination and the need for joint analysis, joint action and joint programming on health, nutrition and social protection as safeguards against future shocks. He had also highlighted a school meals coalition that was gaining momentum in the process leading to the United Nations food systems summit.
347. A summary report of the joint meeting would be posted in all WFP official languages in advance of the Board's 2021 second regular session.

Summary of the work of the Executive Board

2021/EB.A/29 Summary of the work of the 2021 first regular session of the Executive Board

348. The President reported that the Rapporteur for the Board's 2021 first regular session had prepared the summary of that session and that in April 2021 a draft of it had been distributed to Board members, who had made several suggestions that had then been incorporated into the draft. The Board then approved the summary.

Verification of adopted decisions and recommendations

349. Introducing the item the President observed that the current session had, like previous sessions, proceeded smoothly despite being conducted remotely through electronic means, and he commended the Secretariat and the technical staff who had made it possible. He highlighted some of the discussions that took place during the session, including those with the special guest on the topic of the forthcoming United Nations food systems summit, those on the approval of

WFP's people policy and those on the various annual reports detailing WFP's performance in 2020.

350. The Rapporteur then confirmed that the decisions and recommendations presented in the draft compilation of decisions and recommendations adopted by the Board at the current session corresponded to those that had been agreed during the session. The final versions of the adopted decisions and recommendations would be posted on the Board's website the following week and a draft summary of the discussions that took place during the session would be circulated for comment in due course.

Acronyms

BUSBE	bottom up strategic budgeting exercise
CCI	critical corporate initiative
CCS	country capacity strengthening
COMET	country office tool for managing effectively
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CSP	country strategic plans
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GCMF	Global Commodity Management Facility
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
KPI	key performance indicator
NGO	non-governmental organization
OEV	Office of Evaluation
PSA	programme support and administrative (budget)
PSEA	protection from sexual exploitation and abuse
SCOPE	WFP's digital beneficiary information and transfer management platform
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNSDCF	United Nations sustainable development cooperation framework
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WINGS	WFP Information Network and Global System