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**Executive Board  
Third Regular Session**

**Rome, 21–25 October 2002**

# **EVALUATION REPORTS**

## **Agenda item 6**

***For consideration***

# **E**

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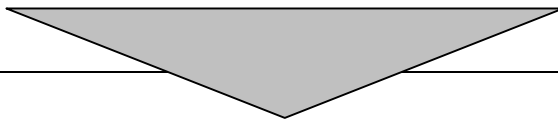
23 August 2002

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## **SUMMARY REPORT OF THE THEMATIC EVALUATION OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

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# Note to the Executive Board



**This document is submitted for consideration to the Executive Board.**

The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the WFP staff focal points indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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# Executive Summary

Although WFP has undertaken special logistics interventions during most of its history, the Special Operations (SO) category became an official, separate, programme category following discussions on WFP's Resource and Long-Term Financing (R&LTF) policies at the 40<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA) in November 1995. One of the reasons for establishing the category was to facilitate funding by donors who had a special interest in this type of logistics-related operation and who may have been unwilling or unable to fund higher core operational costs (e.g. increased landside transport, storage and handling [LTSH] costs).

From April to June 2001, the two-person (independent consultant) evaluation team undertook a desk study of 24 operational SOs and, through field visits, examined a selection of nine active SOs in five different countries (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and southern Sudan).

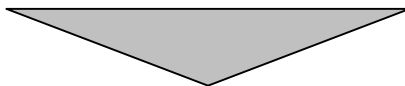
The activities underlying the SOs were, in most cases, justified. Most of the operations were effective in that they achieved their objectives, even if some of them were not run as originally planned, and most of them were efficiently managed. While cost-efficiency, where applicable, was achieved, a cost-benefit analysis was not calculated regularly or attempted before the start of an operation. In infrastructure projects, WFP sometimes undertook large-scale rehabilitation works that went beyond the immediate aim of improving the delivery of relief food aid.

Special Operations procedures and guidelines are generally lacking and need to be developed immediately to prevent some of the current weaknesses. This should include guidelines for SOs that support the humanitarian community in general. Peer review of SOs through the Programme Review Committee (PRC) has led to improvement of proposals for funding. Although some SO budgets appear to have been poorly managed in the past, management of budgets should improve with the WFP Information Network and Global System (WINGS).

The mission concluded that SOs were justified for infrastructure works related to major cross-operational logistics obstacles (such as port works), and for inter-agency coordination operations (such as air services, telecommunications, joint logistics management and coordination services). It had concerns about the difficulty in managing multi-faceted SOs and about the creation of SOs for a number of interventions that, it seemed to the mission, could have been covered within the underlying core emergency or protracted relief and recovery operation (EMOP or PRRO). It is recognized, however, that funding obtained for SOs may be important for a rapid start-up in the first phase of a new emergency operation or when new or unexpected needs arise during an ongoing relief operation.



## Draft Decision



The Board takes note of the recommendations contained in this evaluation report (WFP/EB.3/2002/6/2) and of the management action taken so far, as described in the associated information paper (WFP/EB.3/2002/INF/12). The Board encourages further action on these recommendations, with considerations raised during the discussion taken into account.



## INTRODUCTION

1. Special Operations were launched by WFP's Transport and Logistics Division (OT) in support of EMOPs and PRROs. These operations were meant to address the specific logistical bottlenecks that hindered a smooth and effective flow of relief food.
2. In 1995, Special Operations became an official separate programme category, with expenditures growing from US\$18 million to a peak of US\$34 million per year by 2000. Not all SOs have been well funded, however, and a separate SO review managed by the Transport and Logistics Division will look at SO resourcing issues in more detail. The evaluation discussed in this report was planned to improve understanding of the SO category and, therefore, better identify the factors that may contribute to funding shortfalls.
3. The evaluation took place during April to June 2001 and comprised a two-week desk study, followed by a week of consultations, revision of preliminary findings and preparation of case studies.<sup>1</sup> The nine case studies then took place in the field, in five African countries, during three weeks. A consultant with extensive experience in WFP relief and logistics operations assisted the team leader.
4. The scope and methodology of the desk study were revised to exclude completed operations, in view of insufficient information and documents. Consequently, the desk study concentrated on 24 ongoing operations, out of some 30 approved SOs. Operations concerning passenger air transport services were not reviewed in detail, as the mission was informed that OT would conduct a separate review of these operations.
5. The desk study covered as many operations as available documentation allowed. For the field studies it was proposed that operations in Djibouti, East Timor, Ethiopia, Kenya, Kosovo, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and southern Sudan be studied. However, operations in Rwanda, Kosovo and East Timor were not chosen for various reasons (e.g. East Timor had just been the subject of a recent separate WFP evaluation). SOs in Liberia and Sierra Leone, initially selected, had to be abandoned, as no security clearance could be obtained. Consequently, only the choices of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique and southern Sudan were kept. The following nine SOs were evaluated during the field mission:
  - 6191—Djibouti: port rehabilitation and upgrading;
  - 6243—Djibouti: roads rehabilitation;
  - 6247—Ethiopia: light aircraft;
  - 6248—Ethiopia: logistics coordination unit;
  - 6282—Kenya: Garissa-Dadaab road rehabilitation;
  - 6277—Kenya: emergency road and river crossing repairs;
  - 6230—Mozambique: air rescue;
  - 6237—Mozambique: multifaceted floods; and
  - 6036—Southern Sudan: emergency aid (classified as infrastructure).

<sup>1</sup> The submission of this evaluation report has been delayed, to coincide with the preparation and submission of the separate OTL review of Special Operations, as the two documents are complementary.



6. Out of 31 SOs submitted by OT for review, 7 were non-operational, due to lack of funding. The 31 SOs had approved budgets (including their expansion phases, where applicable) of some US\$151 million. The 9 SOs (and their expansion phases, where applicable) used as field case studies for this evaluation were valued at some US\$51 million, or 34 percent of the total value of all approved and then current SOs (April-June 2001). Funding for the current 31 SOs stood at some US\$74 million, or 49 percent of the approved budgets, at the time of the evaluation.

## FINDINGS

### Definition of a Special Operation

7. The evaluation mission compared the four definitions of Special Operations that are currently in use at WFP, in their chronological order.

#### ⇒ *WFP Transport and Logistics Manual 1998*

A Special Operation:

- is complementary to an emergency operation;
- is limited in scope and size;
- is short-term;
- is targeted to eliminate specific operational bottlenecks that hinder the efficient and cost-effective delivery of relief aid;
- covers non-food-related activities not covered by LTSH or direct support costs (DSC)—such as airlifts, telecommunications and rehabilitation or upgrading interventions on roads, bridges and ports—in order to permit quick and cost-effective delivery of relief cargo on a sustainable basis.

#### ⇒ *Guide to WFP Resource and Long-Term Financing Policies 1999*

A Special Operation:

- improves infrastructure for speedy and efficient delivery of food aid;
- serves as a vehicle for rehabilitation and future development;
- does not provide commodities.

#### ⇒ *General Regulations 2000*

A Special Operation:

- includes activities to rehabilitate and enhance transport infrastructure;
- is used if necessary and in extraordinary circumstances;
- permits speedy and efficient food delivery; and
- meets emergency and protracted relief needs.



## ⇒ Programme Design Manual 2001

A Special Operation:

- involves logistics and infrastructure works;
  - helps the movement of WFP and non-WFP food;
  - is short term in nature;
  - is generally complementary to emergency operations; and
  - covers non-food-related activities that are not covered by LTSH, DSC or direct operational costs (DOC), such as airlifts, telecommunications, works to roads, bridges, ports.
8. While the Programme Design Manual follows the definition of the WFP Transport and Logistics Manual, both their definitions vary somewhat from the definition given by the General Regulations, which is more restrictive (“if necessary and in extraordinary circumstances”). In terms of hierarchy, the General and Financial Regulations and the Resource and Long-Term Financing policy take precedence over the two manuals. WFP continued applying the broader definition of Special Operations, and in the management of these operations, the short-term criterion mentioned in the WFP Transport and Logistics Manual and Programme Design Manual was not always followed.
  9. The operations in Madagascar (floods), Zambia (food by air) and Kenya (road infrastructure for food transport) met the criteria set forth in any of the four definitions of Special Operations: delivery of food, emergency situation, and logistics problems.
  10. Some observers felt that operations such as the organization of inter-agency passenger air services or the reconstruction of the Caucasus railway system went far beyond any of the four definitions. SOs such as those for East Timor, the Mozambique air rescue and the India earthquake relief were designed to provide support to complex disaster relief operations.

## Justification

11. The evaluation mission had to determine if an activity was justified in the first place and if that activity was further justified becoming an SO. While the activities underlying SOs were, in most if not all the cases examined, justified, the evaluation of the justification of SOs led the evaluation mission to reflect on the SO concept.
12. The ability of WFP field staff to identify logistics bottlenecks and deal with them, and Headquarters’ successful backing of its field staff, have been major factors in WFP’s success in achieving timely food delivery to needy beneficiaries.
13. Since its early days, WFP’s priority has been to deliver food to beneficiaries on time and in a cost-efficient way. In fulfilment of its mandate, WFP has been performing special logistics interventions for well over 25 years. In fact, these “special” interventions played a major role in the history of the Programme. In many cases the food would not have been delivered on time or at all had it not been for these special logistics interventions, which regularly saved considerable amounts of money.
14. In 1995, in order to formalize the existing ad hoc arrangements, the SO was made a separate programme category. This also helped address the reservations of some donors about funding higher non-food costs of core operations, particularly higher landside transport, storage and handling costs.



15. As some SOs, primarily infrastructure operations, are a foreseeable logistics component of an EMOP or PRRO, it could be argued that they should have remained part of EMOPs or PRROs and have been included in the operational documents and budgets when they were submitted for approval, especially when the works required were of a relatively minor nature compared with the size and budget of the overall WFP relief operation. In these cases, it is possible that better forward planning and accurate, detailed assessment of logistics requirements and constraints could have kept the number of SOs lower. (The counter-arguments to this, presented to the mission by several OT staff, are that SOs may have provided better forward funding and that some special logistics needs could not have been foreseen at the start of a relief operation.)
16. The evaluation team recognized, however, that some major infrastructure works, taken on for the benefit of several different relief operations, were quite rightly managed as separate operations, as they were not linked to one underlying activity. Port infrastructure improvements, for instance, usually benefited many WFP operations, as well as other relief organizations, and aided the delivery of food to several countries in the same region.
17. Air operations for passengers and cargo are part of inter-agency coordination and service provision. WFP has been ensuring such coordination in various disaster relief interventions, at its partners' request, for more than a decade. Over the years, other aspects of such coordination, such as the setting-up of radio networks and the creation of joint coordination cells, have been included.
18. Roadworks, the most frequent among the infrastructure SOs of the 24 SOs reviewed, require further comment. The mission felt that the necessity of performing some of the roadworks examined during the field case studies could have been avoided through better forward planning, including limiting the use of laterite and dirt roads during the rainy season. Using these non-hard-top roads during the rainy season requires four- or six-wheel-drive trucks and damages the road much more than during the dry season, resulting not only in higher delivery costs but also in higher road repair costs during or after the rainy season. More pre-positioning of food, where resources and pipelines are adequate, can help prevent or lessen such problems.
19. The mission noted WFP's tendency to address road obstacles with extensive repairs and full-scale rehabilitation instead of with trouble-spot repairs. Rehabilitation<sup>2</sup> can cost millions of dollars, takes a long time and does not always guarantee long-term sustainability. The deciding factor must remain: How necessary and sufficient—and not how opportune or useful—is it to proceed with repairs? If food delivery is urgent, and if the road conditions prevent such delivery, then WFP will have to arrange for those necessary and sufficient repairs.

### **Effectiveness and Efficiency<sup>3</sup>**

20. Most of the operations achieved their objectives and were, hence, effective, even if some of them were not run as initially planned or saw some components abandoned or reduced due to lack of funding. The field survey confirmed the findings of the desk study.

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<sup>2</sup> or sometimes full-scale road construction, such as in Liberia and Mozambique.

<sup>3</sup> Effectiveness is the extent to which the operation's objectives are achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance. Efficiency is a measure of how economically inputs are converted into outputs.





21. Whether or not the operations were efficiently managed is not directly evident from the narrative reports or from the requests for extension, but is indirectly evident from the results obtained. Inevitably, some problems occurred, but the combination of the desk and field studies leads to the finding that most of the operations were indeed efficiently managed. The full technical report contains details on the nine case studies.

### **Cost-effectiveness<sup>4</sup>**

22. While forecasts of overall savings were often one of the reasons why an operation was selected, detailed cost-benefit calculations were not regularly performed. Such calculations are difficult to make, however, and may be based on assumptions. In most of the SOs studied, the benefits resulting from the operations were evident and the costs involved justified.
23. What was generally carried out inadequately, in the case of applying for a roadwork operation, was the estimate of how much would be saved on transport costs if the roadwork were carried out. It is not always possible to give an exact estimate of this, but it should be possible to provide a reasonable estimate of projected savings. A need for better training in road transport cost calculations was therefore identified by some WFP field staff.
24. The question of cost-effectiveness is not the primary consideration in operations initiated for the sake of staff safety in hazardous situations. Some situations can lack cost-effectiveness but still be necessary, such as when one passenger is flown in a six-seat plane for security or medical reasons. Cost-effectiveness, such as with enhanced telecommunications, is not easily calculable.

### **The Quality of Drafting Proposals for SOs**

25. Some SO proposals submitted for approval—containing the objectives, indicators, proposed plan of action, etc.—were well drafted, clear, to the point and well documented. Many others, however, were not. In such reports, assessments were not always clearly explained and objectives not always detailed. Regularly, operation proposals did not refer to feasibility studies or assessments that had previously been performed. The authors of some proposals did not always keep in mind that they were addressing readers who were not necessarily familiar with the given operation. While others spent too much time detailing the background of an operation. Also, needless repetition of the same explanation appeared in subsequent requests for extension or expansion. However, it must be pointed out that the fact that several SOs followed a “fast-track” preparation and approval procedure, in view of the urgency of the situation they were addressing, may explain some of these deficiencies in design and drafting.

### **Absence of Systems and Procedures**

26. The guidance for SOs is based on a limited section in the WFP Transport and Logistics Manual, which contains cross-references to guidance on other kinds of operations. Although some procedures and guidelines applying to EMOPs or PRROs may also apply to parts of SOs, the importance of SOs, and their special characteristics and requirements, call for the creation of a comprehensive set of operational procedures and guidelines. (As the internal WFP Special Operations Working Group correctly pointed out, the absence of operational systems, procedures and guidelines was the reason for many of the aforementioned weaknesses.)

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<sup>4</sup> Cost-effectiveness analysis combines programme costs and effects (impacts); however, the impacts do not have to be transformed into monetary benefits (or drawbacks).



27. It was interesting to see how the intervention of the inter-divisional Programme Review Committee and the introduction of a reporting format brought about significant improvements in the drafting of proposals, in the presentation of arguments, in the specification of assessment parameters and performance indicators, and in reporting. The mission felt that this peer review was an important part of the approval process and should not be omitted, as it ensured additional quality control and discipline.

### Documentary Cover and Reporting

28. The files submitted by the country offices to the evaluation mission were systematically better documented and more complete than those made available to the mission at Headquarters for its desk study. This may be expected in the new decentralized environment.
29. Report writing was conducted recently as a major exercise in order to cover the reporting gap to donors between 1996 and 1999. During the field visits, the evaluation mission discovered that reporting from the field was much more regular than expected.<sup>5</sup>
30. If some final reports were good, others were not. Some were rather brief. Others raised questions that remained unanswered. As reporting to donors is crucial not only for justifying the contribution but also for securing further funding for the same or other operations, great importance should be given to accurate, comprehensive and regular reporting. Reports should also be pleasant and interesting to read.
31. In general, reports did not sufficiently highlight the benefits realized through the operations. A large part of some reports consisted of repetition of the background that led to WFP's intervention. While many reports described well the activities performed, several missed important points and did not insist enough on the benefits realized, be it directly or indirectly. Donors would be encouraged if they could read in detail, for example, how SOs involving road and bridge repair led to considerable savings in transport costs through reduced road haulage rates.

### Budgets

32. Documents submitted to the mission by the Finance Division showed that there was confusion, at times, regarding contributions. The study of these documents, combined with interviews with staff members, revealed that sometimes contributions were wrongly earmarked—though, fortunately, this was infrequent. This is one of the findings also noted in the internal WFP Special Operations Working Group report. The mission was informed, however, that budget management was being considerably improved with the introduction of WINGS.
33. In some cases, budgets seem to have been overestimated.<sup>6</sup> While it can be argued that overestimating is better than underestimating, the impact of this on donors should not be underrated, especially considering that WFP must remain competitive in the overall aid environment. To start with, operational procedures, with guidelines on how to estimate costs per subject per area,<sup>7</sup> would help. The mission acknowledges that it is not always easy to estimate budgets. However, completing an operation with less than the full expected budget does not mean that the initial budget was wrong. Especially in the case of

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<sup>5</sup> sometimes up to every two weeks, which was considered excessive.

<sup>6</sup> Caucasus Logistics Advisory Unit (CLAU), Liberia roads, Mozambique roads and Djibouti port.

<sup>7</sup> similar to existing rates for air charter, shipping, port dues, handling charges.



road infrastructure, budget ranges can be defended, with prices varying per region, per period, per contractor,<sup>8</sup> and, of course, per intended kind of work. Budgets for works are often adjusted in light of funding shortfalls, and the filling of potholes or spot repairs may have to replace more extensive original road repairs.

34. If WFP manages to complete its planned operations with reduced funding, the Programme should not merely subtract obtained funds from required funds and call the balance a shortfall. Reports to donors should explain how the objectives were scaled down in order to match available funding.
35. Many staff interviewed by the evaluation team insisted on the necessity of setting up SOs in order to obtain sufficient funding for logistics costs when donors are unwilling or unable to contribute to a higher LTSH cost within EMOPs and PRROs. SOs enable donors to appreciate the logistical work and its costs. For some donors the restrictions imposed by their budgetary sources and their different budgetary regulations make funding SOs easier than funding higher LTSH costs.
36. However, the continuing shortfall of funding for SOs seems to indicate that not all donors are following in practice what they say they prefer in terms of funding. This issue will be examined in more depth by OTL's separate Special Operations review.

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

37. A large part of the 24 Special Operations examined were infrastructure works directly related to WFP's first priority, which is to deliver food on time to beneficiaries. The ability of WFP field staff to identify and deal with logistics bottlenecks has been a major factor in WFP's becoming the lead United Nations agency in transport and logistics. WFP's successes have triggered the development of logistics services—related not only to food transport but also to other aspects of humanitarian operations—into more comprehensive operations for the benefit of all. Sometimes SOs resulted in full infrastructure development projects or the provision of multi-modal inter-agency service. While, essentially, SOs are meant to be short term and complementary, some became linked to longer-term development.
38. Some SOs are a foreseeable logistics component of an EMOP or PRRO, and it can be argued that they should therefore remain part of the core relief operation and budget. Advanced planning<sup>9</sup> may have reduced the scope of some SOs. Especially in the case of roadwork projects, the criteria for choosing to do the work should remain the work's necessity and sufficiency, and not merely opportunity or the work's usefulness.
39. SOs were initiated by OT. The rules and systems governing the SOs came afterwards. This explains several of the weaknesses found. The absence of integrated operational procedures and guidelines is a major shortcoming and should be addressed with priority. The introduction of some standard procedures—such as submitting the proposal to the PRC and creating a standard reporting format—has resulted in recent improvements.
40. At times, operational budgets have been overestimated. On other occasions, operations were scaled down to the absence of full funding, but were nevertheless implemented with a reduced scope and reduced means, without the underlying operation's becoming unduly jeopardized. The difference between an original budget and funds received should not

<sup>8</sup> state or private.

<sup>9</sup> such as food pre-positioning before the rainy season.



always be presented as a shortfall, if the main part of the proposed work programme was completed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

41. Consideration should be given to keeping only two kinds of SOs, namely:
  - **Infrastructure operations** for major, cross-operational, logistics obstacles: This category could cover major infrastructure activities that go far beyond the logistics component of an underlying operation, that concern a whole region and a great number of benefiting operations, and that can be considered distinct projects given that their impact will continue for many years after the SO is completed. An example is the Djibouti port works.
  - **Inter-agency coordination operations** (passenger air services, telecommunications, joint logistics management or coordination services). This category should include the inter-service management of complex relief operations.
42. In certain cases it may be possible to include smaller-scale special logistics needs under the plan and budget (i.e. ODOC) of the core relief operation, rather than setting up a separate SO. This should be considered on a case-by-case basis.
43. Although some guidance does exist (e.g. in the Programme Design Manual), the evaluation mission recommends that comprehensive operational procedures and guidelines be issued. Such procedures should include, among other details:
  - a more precise official definition of what is or could become a Special Operation, including the criteria required to qualify for a Special Operation;
  - stricter assessment parameters;
  - the identification, definition and application of performance indicators, with a distinction between key performance indicators at the senior management level and tactical performance indicators for the field;
  - guidelines that include definitions for requirements, cost-efficiency/cost-benefit calculations and budget calculation;
  - forms or templates for proposal drafting, budget calculation, cost calculation, interim reporting, final reporting and financial reporting; and
  - guidelines on field monitoring and evaluation of SOs.
44. Training sessions for implementing the procedures should be foreseen.
45. Modern means of communication should be used, allowing for digital pictures and maps. The creation of fully illustrated<sup>10</sup> and regularly updated web pages for each operation would facilitate reporting and improve presentation to donors, thus triggering higher donor interest while avoiding dry post-factum reporting. Donor interest could be monitored by recording the number of hits on the web page.

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<sup>10</sup> showing, for example, photographs of a bush track immediately after the floods and of the same spot after road rehabilitation.



## ANNEX

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**LIST OF DOCUMENTS REVIEWED**

- 5857 Angola: passenger air transport
- 5970 Angola: non-food-item air transport (classified as infrastructure)
- 5887\* Angola: de-mining
- 10027\* Angola: multifaceted voice and data communications
- 6289\* Bhutan: emergency bridge repairs
- 6325\* Burundi: air operations
- 10029 Democratic People's Republic of Korea: multifaceted local blended food production/logistics
- 6191 Djibouti: port rehabilitation and upgrading
- 6243 Djibouti: roads rehabilitation
- TBA\* Djibouti: provision of transportation for food aid distribution.
- 6178 East Timor: multifaceted logistics operation
- 6247 Ethiopia: light aircraft
- 6248 Ethiopia: logistics coordination unit (classified as air)
- 6261 Ethiopia/Somalia: Berbera corridor emergency road rehabilitation
- 6262 Eritrea: augmentation of logistics capacity
- 6320 Georgia: Caucasus passenger air transport—regional light aircraft.
- 10061 Guinea: passenger air transport
- 10024 India: augmentation of logistics capacity for Gujarat earthquake
- 6031 Italy: WFP strategic stocks/warehouse—UNHRD
- 6277 Kenya: emergency road and river crossing repairs
- 6282\* Kenya: Garissa-Dadaab road rehabilitation
- 6133 Kosovo: multifaceted transport
- 6004 Liberia: roads and bridges rehabilitation
- 6238\* Madagascar: floods logistics
- 6237 Mozambique: multifaceted floods
- 6230 Mozambique: air rescue
- 6071 Sierra Leone: helicopter support
- 6229 Sierra Leone: logistics support
- 5866 Somalia: common air service
- 6036 Southern Sudan: emergency aid (classified as infrastructure)
- 6219 Zambia: food air transport

\* Not operational at the time of the mission's visit, due to the absence of funding.



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## ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

CFA	Committee Food Aid Policies and Programmes
CLAU	Caucasus Logistics Advisory Unit
DOC	Direct operational cost
DSC	Direct support cost
EMOP	Emergency operation
LTSH	Landside transport, storage and handling
ODOC	Other direct operational cost
OT	WFP's transport and logistics division
OTL	WFP's logistics service
PRC	Programme Review Committee
PRRO	Protracted relief and recovery operation
R&LTF	Resource and Long-Term Financing
SO	Special operation
WINGS	WFP Information Network and Global System

