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PROTRACTED REFUGEE AND DISPLACED PERSON PROJECTS FOR EXECUTIVE BOARD APPROVAL

Agenda item 8 b)



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PROJECT NEPAL 5324.02

(WIS No. 00532402)

Food assistance to Bhutanese refugees in Nepal

WFP food cost	6,675,085 dollars
Total cost to WFP	7,827,973 dollars
Total cost	12,624,720 dollars
Number of beneficiaries	93,500
Duration	One year (1 January - 31 December 1998)

All monetary values are expressed in United States dollars, unless otherwise stated. In May 1997, one United States dollar equalled 33.70 Nepali rupees.

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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document contains recommendations for review and approval by the Executive Board.

Pursuant to the decisions taken on the methods of work by the Executive Board at its First Regular Session of 1996, the documentation prepared by the Secretariat for the Board has been kept brief and decision-oriented. The meetings of the Executive Board are to be conducted in a business-like manner, with increased dialogue and exchanges between delegations and the Secretariat. Efforts to promote these guiding principles will continue to be pursued by the Secretariat.

The Secretariat therefore invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document, to contact the WFP staff member(s) listed below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting. This procedure is designed to facilitate the Board's consideration of the document in the plenary.

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BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR PROVIDING ASSISTANCE

1. The ethnic conflict and civil unrest resulting from the strict citizenship measures taken by the Government of Bhutan triggered an influx of ethnic Nepali asylum seekers into Nepal from early 1991. More than 90,000 people are at present living in seven camps in the districts of Jhapa and Morang in southeastern Nepal. The seventh and latest ministerial-level round of talks between the two governments was held in Kathmandu in April 1996, without any tangible results, although it was agreed that discussions should be continued. In earlier rounds the two governments agreed to classify the people in the camps into four categories: a) bonafide Bhutanese forcibly evicted from Bhutan; b) Bhutanese who emigrated; c) non-Bhutanese people; and d) Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts. However, the two governments hold different positions on how to proceed with the actual verification of the camp population. Disagreement appears to centre on the modalities for identifying and treating people in the second category as many of them claim they were forced to leave their homes, while the Government of Bhutan maintains they migrated voluntarily, thereby relinquishing, under Bhutanese law, their citizenship status and the right to return.
2. Since the last round of talks, several initiatives have been taken by UNHCR, Member States of the European Union and other interested countries, to find an early solution to the stalemate. Recent contacts between the Nepal and Bhutan governments give reason to believe that both countries continue to be committed to achieving results within the framework of their bilateral talks. UNHCR, for its part, has expressed its readiness to assist in the implementation of any agreement reached between the two governments.
3. WFP has been providing food assistance to the refugees since 1992 under a series of five emergency operations and two protracted refugee operations (PROs), at a total cost of 27.5 million dollars as at the end of 1996. The ongoing PRO No. 5324/01, approved at the Fortieth Session of the CFA in November 1995 to provide assistance to 90,000 refugees and asylum seekers over a period of 24 months, at a total cost to WFP of 16.4 million dollars, is due to terminate on 30 November 1997. WFP supplies basic food rations consisting of rice, pulses, vegetable oil, sugar, salt, blended food, and supplementary feeding (blended food, oil and sugar), while UNHCR supplies fresh vegetables. The food basket has been gradually improved over the years, with the addition of sugar and salt in 1993, the introduction of parboiled rice and addition of blended food to the basic ration in 1994, and the replacement of regular salt by iodized salt in 1995. The daily per capita rice ration was reduced from 450 to 430 grams in 1993.
4. Studies over the years have reported a low level of food sales and/or exchanges. A study conducted by Save the Children Fund (SCF) in May 1997 concluded that only a small portion of the ration (less than five percent) is sold or exchanged, mainly in order to purchase items such as clothing, matches, tea and other necessary commodities.
5. Given the current state of bilateral talks, there is no immediate possibility of the refugees returning to their country of origin, Nepal, which is an LDC and unable to support a large number of refugees. Under the circumstances, and given that the refugees are confined in camps with no access to land or resources, the continuation of food and other assistance beyond the current phase of operation is imperative. The joint WFP/UNHCR food assessment mission, which visited Nepal from 18 to 30 May 1997,



recommended that the current PRO be extended by one month up to 31 December 1997, to allow for the utilization of the commodity savings resulting from the lower-than-expected influx, and that further food assistance be supplied for 93,500 refugees and asylum-seekers for the entire 1998 calendar year (365 days).

GOVERNMENT POLICY/ACTIONS

6. His Majesty's Government of Nepal has pursued an open-door policy in providing asylum to the Bhutanese refugees. With support from multilateral agencies, bilateral donors and NGOs, the refugees and asylum seekers have been relocated from spontaneous settlements into organized camps. Since mid-1992, a Refugee Coordination Unit (RCU) has been established under the Ministry of Home for the purpose of registering and documenting asylum-seekers and refugees in Nepal. Since June 1993, the RCU has been operating a screening centre at the checkpoint in Kakarvitta at the Indo-Nepal border, where claims for refugee status by newly-arrived asylum seekers are examined. The Government has established a permanent presence in the camps by appointing camp supervisors as administrative focal points, and establishing a police check post in each camp to maintain law and order. It also arranges for exemption of tax or duty on goods and services purchased and contracted for the assistance programme. The Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation is responsible for implementing activities for the environmental protection and rehabilitation of forest areas affected by the presence of the refugees and asylum seekers.
7. The Government contributed equivalent to 200,000 dollars local currency for local procurement of pulses to be distributed in the camps in 1996 and 1997, and has also contributed to meeting the costs of staff engaged in maintaining the administrative set-up at the camp level. In addition, it has expressed willingness to make a cash contribution equivalent to 100,000 dollars for 1998.
8. Forest reserves, village pastures and other open areas adjoining the camps have suffered some damage due to the foraging and wood-collecting activities of the people in the camps. Other consequences include the deterioration of roads used by heavy vehicles going to and from the camps, pressure on local hospitals and disputes with local residents. A UNHCR mission in May 1997 concluded that, overall the environmental consequences were not serious, mainly due to the provision of kerosene for cooking purposes, limiting the need for fuelwood.
9. UNHCR will continue to provide kerosene rations in the camps. In line with the agreements between UNHCR and the Ministry of Forests and Soil Conservation, various measures have been taken, such as establishing tree nurseries, fencing forest land to promote regeneration of forests, strengthening district forestry offices by providing logistical support, and recruiting additional forest guards. These continuing measures will protect the environment in and around the camps. WFP has contributed funds from the sale of empty containers for the construction of local roads in and around the camps, the construction of gabions for river embankment protection, and the construction of bridges and culverts through food-for-work activities. These activities will continue during 1998 with the use of cash from the sale of empty containers and an input from WFP of 500 tons of rice for food-for-work activities, using stocks carried forward from the 1997 operation. Activities will be identified on the basis of their potential to benefit



the local community and the refugees, and will be undertaken by the UNHCR-sponsored and coordinated Refugee Area Rehabilitation Project (RARP).

10. All camps have educational facilities for primary education and offer possibilities for secondary and higher education. UNHCR fully covers the primary education programme for all children in the camps and CARITAS covers the entire management of the secondary classes. The courses taught in schools in the camps are identical to those followed in Nepal and Bhutan. There is an increasing demand in the camps for post-secondary education. Owing to the limited possibility of attending higher educational institutions outside the camps, correspondence courses are currently available and their use may be expanded.

DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

11. There is little scope for development activities in view of the Government's continued non-integration policy towards refugees and asylum seekers in Nepal. However, some refugee families make a small income through the sale of fruit and vegetables grown in the camp and from other income-generating activities on a limited scale, such as weaving, sewing and preparation of jute products, mainly by women in the camps (five percent of the total camp population). Furthermore, 260 women have volunteered as counsellors for the NGOs involved in family-planning issues, non-formal education and the collection of data on vulnerable groups. The number of women counsellors is expected to increase dramatically during the next phase, as it has been agreed that the refugee women will take full responsibility by 1999 for non-formal education activities in the camps. Approximately two percent of the camp population, both women and men, have jobs with NGOs or the UNHCR-sponsored camp-based RARP, for which they receive a cash incentive payment and food from WFP as part-payment of wages. Funds available with WFP from the sale of empty containers will, in future, be utilized for income-generating activities targeting women and vulnerable groups.
12. An SCF "Household Food Economy Assessment" commissioned by UNHCR and WFP in May 1997, has estimated, while taking into account the difficulties in obtaining an accurate assessment of numbers, that between 20 and 60 percent of families have at least one family member engaged in seasonal agricultural work or construction work outside the camps, for three or four months a year. However, their income is not sufficient to substitute, in any significant way, for the basic rations provided by WFP. According to the study, up to 55 percent of the refugee families in the four camps studied are totally dependent on the WFP-supplied basic food rations as a source of sustenance and income.

OBJECTIVE OF WFP ASSISTANCE

13. WFP assistance will provide basic food rations to registered Bhutanese refugees and asylum seekers residing in seven camps in the districts of Jhapa and Morang in the eastern region of Nepal, as well as supplementary food rations for refugee children under five years of age, expectant women and nursing mothers for up to six months, tuberculosis patients, and sick or elderly persons. In addition, part of WFP assistance will be provided to undertake small-scale and self-contained micro-projects through food



for work, identified on the basis of their potential to benefit both the local community as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

BENEFICIARIES

14. Although the refugees and asylum-seekers began arriving in Nepal in early 1991, the influx peaked in the first half of 1992 when an average of 800 people a day crossed the border. The flow continued in 1993 and in subsequent years, the number rose from 35,000 in January 1992 to 83,000 in March 1993 then to 87,258 in March 1995 and to 90,592 in April 1997. By 1996, the influx dropped to as low as three people a month, and in the first quarter of 1997 only one person was registered. The annual population growth rate in the camps is between 2 and 2.5 percent and approximately 10 percent of the present camp population was born in the camps.
15. The majority of the refugee population are of Nepali ethnic origin and are composed of family groups. An estimated 26 percent are adult male, 25 percent adult female, and 49 percent children and adolescents aged under 18 years of age. The majority of the refugees are subsistence farmers with little or no education, although there are also a number of educated professional and civil servants.
16. As of April 1997, the number of refugees who benefited from food assistance in the seven camps stood at 90,592 and the total number of all refugees registered (including those who for various reasons have been de-registered), stood at 93,178. The lower figure for food distribution results from absentees in camps at the time of food distribution and to other measures taken by the RCU with respect to beneficiaries engaged in any abusive acts for which temporary disciplinary action led to the curtailment of their food rations.
17. According to the records maintained by Government authorities, there were 92,115 refugees as of 1 January 1997. The joint WFP/UNHCR food assessment mission of May 1997 recommended that a census should be organized during the second half of 1997 to determine the exact number of refugees staying in the camps. In addition, it also considered necessary a review and reconciliation of the various registration records in the different camps, to more accurately determine refugee numbers in terms of arrivals, registrations and assistance.

NON-FOOD INPUTS

18. Apart from the cooking stoves, cooking utensils, water containers and kerosene containers distributed to all families and considered adequate, kerosene is considered the most important non-food item, particularly in view of the resulting preservation of forests. Other essential items such as soap, clothes and mosquito nets are provided by UNHCR.
19. The warehouses in each camp, built using funds generated from the sale of empty containers, have a capacity of 300 tons and provide good food storage and handling space. Food distribution counters at each camp are periodically renovated using funds generated from the sale of empty containers.



20. Several NGOs are involved to varying degrees in activities in the refugee camps, although refugee self-management is being increasingly stressed by UNHCR and NGOs. The Lutheran World Service (LWS) is responsible for the maintenance of water-supplies and sanitation facilities and the SCF, responsible for operating the supplementary feeding programme, has established standard health services in each camp. The Association of Medical Doctors for All (AMDA) runs a health centre to attend to cases referred from the basic health units, while the Centre for Victims of Torture (CVIT) has been responsible for counselling services and medical care for special cases. OXFAM/UK has developed non-formal education programmes and income-generating activities and the Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS) maintains the camp warehouses, monitors food distributions and distributes kerosene and other non-food items. CARITAS is responsible for the construction of schools, the provision of text books and school supplies and the payment of incentives to teachers. The Refugee Women's Forum manages the income-generating activities started by OXFAM/UK and the Water-Induced Disaster Prevention Technical Centre (DPTC) and, assisted by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), provides advice on improving the technical quality of rehabilitation works undertaken with food aid. Finally, the local hospitals run by the Ministry of Health provide in-patient care for refugees.

MODE OF IMPLEMENTATION

21. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates policy issues, the Ministry of Home is the Government's main implementing agency. Its responsibilities include the screening and registration of asylum seekers and refugees, and convening monthly national and district-level (Chief District Officer) coordination meetings of the Government agencies, WFP, UNHCR and NGO partners. Since January 1994, the NRCS has been designated by the Government to act as WFP's food distribution partner; it is responsible for food reception and distribution, record-keeping, and maintaining camp warehouses.
22. For imported foodstuffs, WFP rents a central warehouse with a capacity of 3,000 tons in Birtamod, Jhapa district. The rented warehouse space can be expanded and reduced according to needs. WFP staff directly manage the foodstuffs in the warehouse. The WFP sub-office, established adjacent to the camps, arranges a weekly delivery schedule to the camp warehouses of basic and supplementary food commodities from suppliers and from imported stocks kept in the central warehouse. WFP/NRCS maintain at least two weeks' stock in the camps.
23. The NRCS organizes basic food distribution in the camps and rations are distributed fortnightly. Each camp is divided into several sectors and sub-sectors, depending on the size of the camp population. The sub-sectors, consisting of around 80 to 100 families (400 to 600 individuals) is considered a distribution unit and has an elected sub-sector head, who organizes the distribution of rations to individual families within his/her sub-sector, assisted by refugee distribution volunteers. The distribution is supervised by the Distribution Committee, a sub-committee within the Refugee Camp Committee. NRCS also monitors the distribution and food is distributed for three days each week. NRCS costs are reimbursed by WFP from Monitoring and Logistics funds.
24. Non-food items and vegetables are distributed two days a week. The supplementary feeding is administered by SCF and a high-energy pre-mix is prepared and distributed as



a take-home ration. Therapeutic feeding of the very few cases of severely malnourished children is done at the supplementary feeding centres.

25. Women are present at the time of food distribution, and are also involved in distributing and/or overseeing the distribution of food and non-food commodities. However, there is a low representation of women in the camp committees, which is of concern to both WFP and UNHCR. Sensitization campaigns will be organized through the Refugee Women's Forum, in order to promote gender parity in the camp committees. On the other hand, there has been a dramatic increase in female literacy in the camps. Currently, 3,200 women graduate from the literacy classes every year, which has contributed to a higher awareness of the need to participate in camp activities and provided women with more opportunities. WFP and UNHCR will continue to build on this positive trend.
26. The joint WFP/UNHCR assessment mission in May 1997 noted that the food delivery and distribution system runs very efficiently, with the exception of a few breaks in the delivery pipeline for pulses in recent months. Most food will continue to be procured locally, to the extent that cash is provided by donors, as this has proven to be the most economical approach. Given the preponderance of local purchases, which are mostly delivered directly to the camp warehouses, the mission recommended to reduce the current ITSH rate from 10 to five dollars a ton.
27. The current practice of returning empty sacks and oil containers for sale by WFP, after the distribution of their contents, will continue. The empty containers fund had a bank balance equivalent to 227,208 dollars as of mid-April 1997. These and future generated funds will be utilized in consultation with the Government, UNHCR and NGOs in support of activities benefiting the host community and refugees in camps. These activities may include local Nepali village development projects, improvements in godown facilities and food distribution centres, the establishment of further camp income-generating activities and the upgrading of camp access roads. The joint WFP/UNHCR mission recommended the establishment of agricultural demonstration centres in all camps where adequate space is available. The implementation of this recommendation is subject to the agreement of the Government.

FOOD AID STRATEGY

28. After a careful review of the situation, and in view of the higher energy content of the food ration provided to beneficiaries as compared to the average calorie intake in Nepal (estimated at 1,970), and taking into account the findings and recommendations of the SCF/UK study and the joint WFP/UNHCR mission, it is recommended that the basic food rations (with the exception of rice) be continued at the current level. The rice ration for all camp residents eligible for a general ration will be reduced from 430 grams a day to 410. This will reduce the energy content of the overall ration from 2,245 to 2,175 kilocalories, and will result in a reduction of 675 tons of rice from the current level of annual rice requirement. It is also recommended that the supplementary feeding continue at the current level because, although acute malnutrition rates in children are now low, there is still a prevalence of stunting.



PERFORMANCE MONITORING

29. The health and nutrition activities in the camps are being regularly monitored and evaluated not only by the implementing partners but also through UNHCR's Health Coordination Committee. SCF carries out an annual health and nutrition survey every May/June. This, together with the regular screening of children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating mothers, as well as data from the Basic Health Units, will continue to provide an indication of the efficacy of the basic rations as well as the supplementary feeding programme. Close linkages have been established with the District Health Offices of the Government, who also supply free contraceptives for the family planning programme.
30. WFP and NRCS monitor closely the distribution system of the basic food rations through regular field visits and the review of weekly and monthly reports. The UNHCR sub-office in Bhadrapur produces quarterly situation reports (SitReps), which review the overall refugee operation and cover the health, nutrition and food supply situation. WFP prepares a monthly Food Availability Status Report (FASREP) to send to headquarters, which traces the overall food supply situation and helps to avoid any breaks in the supply. UNHCR also chairs monthly meetings at the field sub-office in which WFP, SCF, AMDA, NRCS, CARITAS, OXFAM, RCU and LWS participate. Central-level coordination meetings, with the participation of representatives of the donor community based in Kathmandu and organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Home, discuss issues regarding food supply, health and nutrition. The current practice of performance monitoring will continue. In addition to the periodic visits to the camp sites by Kathmandu-based WFP staff, a WFP field office has been established at Damak, Jhapa district, to facilitate logistics and monitoring.

NUTRITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS AND THE FOOD BASKET

31. The Joint WFP/UNHCR assessment mission considered the nutritional situation in the camps to be satisfactory. The results of the new nutritional survey are expected at the end of October 1997. However, the last survey conducted by SCF in June 1996 showed that only 0.8 percent of the children were found to be severely malnourished (weight-for-height below <70 percent), which was almost the same as in 1995 (0.9 percent). In the last quarter of 1993, there was an outbreak of beriberi, scurvy, pellagra and angular stomatitis in the camps. By early 1995, the situation was well under control with the introduction by WFP of parboiled rice and fortified blended food in the basic ration. The regular monitoring of micronutrient deficiencies in the camp clinics continues. Health and nutrition education is being disseminated house-to-house by community health workers, the main emphasis being on personal hygiene.



32. Considering the above parameters, the daily per capita ration will be as follows:

Commodity	General ration (grams/day)	Supplementary feeding ration (grams/day)	Food for work ration (grams/workday)
Rice	410	-	500
Pulses	60	-	
Vegetable oil	25	10	
Sugar	20	15	
Salt (iodized)	7.5	-	
Cereal blend	40	80	
Fresh vegetables (UNHCR-supplied)	100	-	
DSM (UNHCR-supplied)	40		

33. The mission recommended that no additional commitment of rice be made for food-for-work activities in 1998, since a projected stock balance of 500 tons should be available at the end of the current PRO and can be earmarked for food-for-work activities next year.

34. The total food requirements for the one year expansion, in tons, are as follows:

Commodity ration	General ration	Supplementary feeding	Total
Rice	14 000		14 000
Pulses	2 048		2 048
Vegetable oil	853	17	870
Sugar	683	25	708
Salt (iodized)	256	-	256
Cereal blend	1 365	134	1 499
Fresh vegetables (UNHCR-supplied)	3 413	3 413	
DSM (UNHCR-supplied)	5	5	

35. All rations are well accepted by the refugees and all foodstuffs supplied by WFP can be purchased locally. In-kind donations of pulses, oil/fat, sugar and blended food may be received, however, subject to positive acceptability testing amongst the refugees. Stocks of imported pulses, oil/fat and blended food could be useful as a buffer stock, in case of disruption in local supplies. However, for pulses and blended food preference is given to local purchases.
36. The WFP basic ration and UNHCR vegetables supply 2,175 kilocalories per person per day, which meets the energy requirements for long-term maintenance of the population. The supplementary feeding pre-mix for expectant and nursing mothers for up to six months of breast feeding, and infants from six to 12 months, provides an additional 456 calories and 13.4 grams of protein per capita per day. For malnourished children, the high-energy pre-mix has been fortified with dried skimmed milk (DSM) at the rate of 40 grams per child per day, and thus provides the child with an extra 600 calories and 27.8 grams of protein per day.



37. The SCF "Household Food Economy Assessment" study concluded that the supplies of calcium and riboflavin (Vitamin B2) in the diet need review, as lack of calcium could be a factor in the high levels of stunting found among children. In addition, the niacin (Vitamin B3) supply in the diet is also below the recommended levels for older children and male adults. The vitamin/mineral fortification of the locally purchased blended food will be reviewed by WFP.

PROJECT COSTS

38. The cost breakdown for the operation is given below.

PROJECT COST BREAKDOWN			
	Quantity (tons)	Average cost per ton (dollars)	Total value (dollars)
WFP COSTS			
A. Direct operational costs			
Commodities ¹			
- Rice	14 000	280	3 920 000
- Pulses	2 048	550	1 126 400
- Vegetable oil/Fat	870	950	826 500
- Sugar	708	335	237 180
- Salt (iodized)	256	60	15 360
- Cereal blend			
Locally purchased <i>Unilito</i>	500	390	195 000
Imported as wheat-soya blend	999	355	354 645
Total commodities	19 381		6 675 085
External transport			219 822
Superintendence			48 453
Inland transport			135 667
ITSH (100 percent)			96 905
Subtotal direct operational costs			7 175 932
B. Direct support costs (see Annex for details)			133 100
Total direct costs			7 309 032
C. Indirect support costs (7,1 percent of total direct costs)			518 941
TOTAL WFP COSTS			7 827 973
COSTS TO UNHCR AND OTHER DONORS			
UNHCR			
- Non-WFP food inputs			651 247
- Agency support and legal assistance			570 117
- Domestic needs			802 116
- Multisectoral relief assistance			
water, health and sanitation			760 956
transport			350 405
shelter			329 848



PROJECT COST BREAKDOWN

	Quantity (tons)	Average cost per ton (dollars)	Total value (dollars)
community services			92 227
education			738 862
crop production			969
TOTAL COST TO UNHCR			4 296 747
OTHER DONORS			
– Government of Nepal			100 000
– NGOs			400 000
TOTAL COST TO UNHCR AND OTHER DONORS			4 796 747
TOTAL PROJECT COSTS (WFP and others)			12 624 720

WFP costs as a percentage of total project costs: 62 percent

¹ This is a notional food basket used for budgeting and approval purposes. The precise mix and actual quantities of commodities to be supplied to the project, as in all WFP-assisted projects may vary over time depending on the availability of commodities to WFP and domestically within the recipient country.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

39. The project is recommended for approval by the Executive Board.



ANNEX

DIRECT SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS

	<i>(dollars)</i>
Staff costs	
International	0
United Nations Volunteers	0
International consultants and SSA	0
National professional officers	0
Local staff and temporaries	121 500
Subtotal	121 500
Travel and DSA	
International	-
In-country	2 000
Subtotal	2 000
Office expenses	
Rental of facility and utilities	3 000
Communications - general	2 000
Office supplies	500
Equipment repair and maintenance	450
Subtotal	5 950
Vehicle operations	
Maintenance	2 000
Fuel	-
Subtotal	2 000
Equipment	
Communication equipment	
Vehicles	
Computer equipment, general	500
Agricultural equipment	
Warehouse equipment	
Furniture and equipment	350
Subtotal	850
Field Staff training	300
Miscellaneous/Contingencies	500
Subtotal	800
TOTAL DIRECT SUPPORT COSTS	133 100

