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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD TO ECOSOC AND THE FAO COUNCIL ON ITS ACTIVITIES IN 1998

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NOTE TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

This document is submitted for consideration and approval to 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.

The WFP focal point for this document is:

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Should you have any questions regarding matters of dispatch of documentation for the Executive Board, please contact the Documentation and Meetings Clerk (tel.: 066513-2641).



INTRODUCTION

1. Article VI of the General Regulations of the World Food Programme (WFP) outlines the functions of the Executive Board and its reporting obligations vis-à-vis the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and the Council of FAO. The functions of the Board can be summarized as the evolution and coordination of food aid policies, the intergovernmental supervision and direction of the management of WFP, and the review and approval of programmes, projects and activities. The same Article of the General Regulations requires that the Board reports annually to ECOSOC and the FAO Council on the major decisions taken by the Board in carrying out those functions.
2. The present report is prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolutions 53/192, 50/120 and 47/199, and ECOSOC resolutions 1998/27, 1997/52, 1997/59 and 1997/6. It will be considered under ECOSOC's provisional agenda item on Reports of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), at its substantive session in July 1999, and at the 116th session of the FAO Council under the provisional agenda item on the World Food Programme.
3. The present report should be read in conjunction with the Annual Report of the Executive Director and its appendices, which are also presented to the above sessions of ECOSOC and the FAO Council. In line with guidance embodied in ECOSOC resolution E/1998/27, and with decision 1999/EB.1/17 of the Executive Board at its First Regular Session of 1999, the Annual Report of the Executive Director contains a thorough analysis of problems encountered and lessons learned, as well as appendices on issues arising from the implementation of the reform programmes of the Secretary-General, the Triennial Policy Review and the follow-up to conferences. The appendices to the Annual Report of the Executive Director on follow-up to several General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions were prepared in a common format agreed to by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP.

BACKGROUND

4. In 1998, the 36 members of the Board, elected by the ECOSOC and the FAO Council were:
Algeria, Angola, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, China, Cuba, Denmark, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Jordan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia and the United States of America.
5. In accordance with the rules of procedure and methods of work adopted by the Board in 1996, the Executive Board elected a Bureau of five members, chosen from among the representatives of the Board, one from each WFP electoral list A to E: El Salvador, list C, as President; the United States of America, list D, as Vice-President; and the representatives of Ethiopia, list A, Indonesia, list B, and Slovakia, list E.



6. In 1998, the Board held four sessions—one Annual and three Regular Sessions. Each was preceded by open-ended informal meetings to brief all members and observers on those agenda items that required policy guidance and/or decision-making.
7. In keeping with the established methods of work, the Board appointed a Rapporteur for each session. At the end of each session, a document containing all decisions and recommendations was verified by the members of the Board. Those Decisions and Recommendations will be annexed to this report when it is presented to ECOSOC. A brief summary of the Board's deliberations was also prepared by the Rapporteur, and endorsed by the Board at its first subsequent session.

GOVERNANCE MATTERS

8. As a result of a heightened interaction and flow of information between the membership and the Secretariat, in addition to the formal meetings of the Executive Board, the membership held a total of 55 additional meetings in the course of 1998 (an increase over the 33 additional meetings held in 1997, and the 14 organized in 1996). These were divided into formal and informal working group meetings, other informal meetings, briefings and consultations.
9. In the same vein, the biennial WFP budget for the period 1998–99 provides for a programme of visits by Board members to countries in which WFP is involved in a wide range of operations. The purpose of these visits is to provide direct contact with and information on WFP activities in the field, to afford an insight into the implementation of WFP's policies and strategies, and to broaden Board members' understanding of the effectiveness of food aid, in a range of operations from emergency to development activities.
10. In September 1998, a mission composed of representatives of Angola, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, China, Finland, India, Morocco and Paraguay visited Ethiopia. The mission concluded that, given the right conditions, food aid can make a valuable contribution to development; that there was a need to develop indicators to measure impact on a systematic basis; and that an attempt should be made to harmonize the differing methodologies for needs assessment among agencies.
11. A second visit was organized to Guatemala and Nicaragua in November 1998, with the participation of the representatives of Bangladesh, Belgium, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Haiti, Indonesia, Sierra Leone and the United States of America. The mission had been originally programmed to observe mostly development activities. However, hurricane Mitch struck the Central America and Caribbean region during the visit. As a result, the mission witnessed WFP's initial response to the emergency. The mission concluded, for example, that there was a need to reinforce cooperation among United Nations organizations involved in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) process and to build into country programmes sufficient flexibility to enable disaster mitigation and disaster preparedness.
12. Following the adoption of WFP's General Regulations by the FAO Conference (resolution 11/97 of 17 November 1997) and by the General Assembly (decision 52/449 of 18 December 1997) which entered into force on 1 January 1998, at its First Regular Session of 1998, the Executive Board confirmed WFP's General Rules and Financial Regulations.



13. Furthermore, in 1998, the Bureau of the Executive Board established two working groups:

- a) In accordance with the guidance received from the General Assembly in its resolution 48/162, and the provisions contained in WFP General Regulation VI.4, the Working Group on the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board began its work in April 1998.

The Working Group was composed of one representative for each electoral list, from A to E: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Hungary, and the United Kingdom. It worked in close collaboration with the Legal Counsel of FAO. The Group met on several occasions during the year and undertook a thorough review of the rules of procedure of other intergovernmental bodies with a view to identifying best practices. In November 1998, the Working Group submitted its final draft to the electoral lists for comments. The Rules of Procedure were approved at the Board's First Regular Session of 1999.

- b) As mandated by the General Assembly in its resolution 50/8 of 1 November 1995, and by the FAO Conference in its resolution 9/95 of 31 October 1995, the distribution of seats of the Executive Board of WFP should be reviewed within two years after the establishment of the Board with a view to achieving its final outcome in accordance with paragraphs 25 and 30, and other relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 48/162. The review would be conducted in parallel by the General Assembly and the Conference of FAO, taking into account the relevant inputs of ECOSOC and the Council of FAO; and the results would enter into force on 1 January 2000.

The Working Group on the Distribution of Seats was composed of two representatives for each electoral list: the United States of America (Chair), Angola, Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, India, Iran, Russian Federation, Senegal and Slovakia. The group held nine meetings during 1998 and worked in close collaboration with the Legal Counsel of FAO. The Chairperson remained in close contact with the Vice-President of ECOSOC and President of the Working Group created to that end. At its Annual and Third Regular Sessions of 1998 the Executive Board was apprised of the strenuous efforts made to reach a conclusion. Negotiations continue with a view to reaching a successful outcome.

POLICY MATTERS

Annual Report of the Executive Director for 1997 (WFP/EB.A/98/3-A)

14. The Board approved the Annual Report of the Executive Director for 1997, commending the Programme for the work carried out during the year, and paying homage to the staff who lost their lives in 1997 in their efforts to save those of so many others.



15. Future annual reports should take into account suggestions made during the Board's deliberations on format and the analysis of constraints and achievements. The Board underlined the need to sharpen WFP's people-centred approach, its focus on the poorest countries and its special emphasis on women and children, and the targeting of resources to these objectives.
16. The Board further recommended that WFP's collaboration with different multilateral organizations continue to be strengthened, and that WFP take full part in the United Nations Reform process.

Other policy issues

17. The Progress Report on WFP's implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action (WFP/EB.1/93/3) had been submitted to the Secretariat of the FAO Committee on World Food Security (CFS) in January 1998. During its debate on this issue, the Board encouraged the Secretariat to pursue and expand its Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) activities, using these activities to build national capacity, increasing linkages with NGOs, and strengthening collaboration and coordination among United Nations agencies, in particular through the UNDAF process at the country level.
18. In endorsing the paper entitled "From crisis to recovery" (WFP/EB.A/98/4-A), the Board reiterated that WFP, with its dual mandate, was well placed to make the link from relief to development, as the Programme has gained valuable experience in this area. The Board emphasized the importance of partnerships, definition of agency roles and complementarity of assistance. It reiterated the need for beneficiaries to play a significant role in the recovery strategy, which should be reflected in the UNDAF, where they exist.
19. As regards the emergency operation programme category, the Board decided that this would be used solely to respond to acute emergency needs, and that only in exceptional circumstances would this exceed a period of two years. During the emergency phase, and not later than the eighteenth month of the emergency operation, a recovery strategy would be prepared and WFP support for protracted relief and recovery from crisis would be guided by that strategy.
20. The Board further decided that the protracted relief operation category would be renamed "protracted relief and recovery operation" (PRRO) and would become the mechanism through which protracted relief and recovery programme activities, developed in the recovery strategy, would be funded. The WFP recovery strategy would be linked, to the extent feasible, with inter-agency mechanisms such as the United Nations Common Strategic Framework, the UNDAF process and the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). Henceforth WFP participation in demining would be restricted to supporting mine clearing in situations where the existence of mines prevented humanitarian food responses from reaching the intended beneficiaries, and to assisting community-based programmes which were directly linked to demining programmes. WFP assistance to demobilization processes would be part of a United Nations strategy and would not include support to armed personnel.
21. At its Annual Session in May 1997, the Board had decided that, in order for the membership to have a forward-looking discussion on key issues. The Secretariat would submit two documents each year to the Executive Board: in odd-numbered years, WFP would issue the Annual Report of the Executive Director and the Strategic and Financial Plan; in even-numbered years, WFP would produce the Annual Report and an Issues Paper. The latter would review a small number of key emerging issues meriting discussion by the



Board. The paper entitled “Emerging issues relevant to WFP” (WFP/EB.A/98/4-B) was the first prepared under the arrangements described above, and the three topics chosen for consideration therein were decided by the Bureau of the Board, following consultation with the regional groups:

- The multilateral character of WFP’s development activities

The importance of WFP’s multilateral character was stressed, as was concern for the decline in multilateral contributions.

- United Nations Reform: field-level collaboration in the provision of development assistance

The Board stressed the importance of common programming, field coordination and joint action, and commended the Programme-wide initiatives and actions in support of UNDAF. Regarding the first Strategic Framework exercise for Afghanistan, the Board endorsed the initiative and encouraged WFP to play a leading role, with emphasis on field-based programming deriving from needs rather than mandates.

- WFP development interventions revitalized

The Board recognized the need for a thorough discussion of the issues involved in food aid and development, particularly in view of the decline in development resources and the urgent need to offset this decline. A consultative process would be initiated with the involvement of donor and recipient countries, NGOs, implementing partners, beneficiaries, bilateral donors and United Nations agencies. The review would seek greater clarity about the situations in which food aid is a particularly effective form of assistance—and when it is not—and assess what this understanding should mean for WFP’s development priorities. This process would culminate in the submission of a policy paper for review by the Board at its Annual Session of 1999.

The first round of consultations took place in October 1998: 118 delegations from States and organizations attended a two-day meeting to discuss the current thinking and principal debates on issues related to the use of food aid in development. The next consultations would follow in February and April 1999.

22. At its Third Regular Session of 1998 the Board considered a paper on “WFP and the environment” (WFP/EB.3/98/3) which summarized the policy and operational issues faced by the organization when integrating environmental concerns in its operations. As in other spheres, the Member States emphasized coordination and working partnerships, especially through UNDAF and the CAP, and the importance of capacity-building. The Board advised WFP to take special care in designing the food basket, thus meeting the food requirements while minimizing the potential environmental risks, and agreed that environmental screening would be undertaken to ascertain that interventions are low-risk. The Programme was asked to minimize the use of hazardous substances and to phase out as rapidly as possible the use of all hazardous chemicals. Operational guidelines for the planning and implementation of environmental activities were prepared in 1998 and finalized in early 1999.

FINANCIAL AND BUDGETARY MATTERS

23. At its Third Regular Session of 1997, the Executive Board directed its Bureau to establish procedures and criteria to be used in the competitive selection and appointment of



the External Auditor beyond 2001, and present these to the Board. At its First Regular Session of 1998, the Board approved the aforementioned procedures and criteria as follows:

- a) The process for selection would comprise five stages ranging through: i) an invitation by the Bureau of the Board to eligible external auditors to submit proposals; ii) the receipt and opening of proposals according to WFP's tender procedures; iii) the evaluation of such by the Bureau which would reconstitute itself into an Evaluation Panel (for this purpose the Bureau of the Board may prepare detailed procedures to be followed in selection and evaluation); iv) the submission of the short-listed proposals to the FAO Finance Committee and the ACABQ for their comments; and v) the Board's decision upon the appointment, based on the evaluation and recommendation of its Bureau.
 - b) The criteria for the selection and appointment of the WFP External Auditor would be: demonstrated autonomy from other institutions; conformity to the auditing standards of the United Nations Panel of External Auditors; training and experience; the formulation of an audit approach and strategy; timely communication of accurate audit results; and the most competitive fees. The Board also agreed that a rating system of the selection criteria would need to be developed.
24. At its Third Regular Session of 1997, the Executive Board had approved the new Financial Regulations of WFP, which took effect in January 1998. The United Nations Panel of External Auditors subsequently suggested changes to the annex to the Financial Regulations which covers the terms of reference governing external audit, in order to ensure that the audit opinion of the External Auditor reflects current best practice and to maintain consistency throughout the United Nations system. The "Revised wording of the audit opinion of the External Auditor" (WFP/EB.1/98/4-B) was approved by the Board at its First Regular Session of 1998.
25. The General Assembly, in its resolution 50/227, decided that "the executive boards of the funds and programmes should review their respective resource requirements in accordance with the relevant decisions taken by the General Assembly and the ECOSOC and decide on the applicable funding arrangements". Furthermore, the Secretary-General's Note (A/52/847 of 31 March 1998, paragraph 13) on "United Nations Reform: measures and proposals: Core Resources for Development", states that the Board of WFP will review its experience with long-term financing policies in support of emergency assistance and development programmes which are deeply linked at the country level. The results of the review and future arrangements will be considered by the Board during 1998, with the aim of establishing resource and long-term financing policies that will provide WFP funding to achieve its mission.
26. At its Second Regular Session of 1998, and following extensive consultation on an informal basis, the Executive Board established the Formal Working Group on the Review of WFP's Resource and Long-term Financing Policies. The report of the Working Group was submitted to the Board's Third Regular Session of 1998, which noted that there was general agreement on the report's recommendations, based on the concept of full-cost recovery. The Working Group recommended that WFP continue to explore opportunities for diverse sources of funding and to continue to dialogue with member states and other donors to promote up-front and untied multilateral contributions. It also recommended that the Board hold a substantive discussion of a future funding strategy for WFP. Formal approval of the recommendations was deferred to, and obtained from, the First Regular Session of the Board in 1999.



27. The “Report on post-delivery losses for the period October 1996–September 1997” (WFP/EB.A/98/6) was reviewed by the Board at its Annual Session of 1998. While recognizing that WFP had continued its efforts to reduce losses, the Board recommended that the commodity tracking system be implemented during 1998 and that all country Basic Agreements be reviewed, where necessary, so as to ensure that proper reference to losses is included.
28. The Board approved the Audited Biennial Accounts (1996–97)—Financial Report and Statements (WFP/EB.3/98/4-A) of WFP, pursuant to General Regulation XIV.6 (b) and Financial Regulation 13.1, and reconfirmed the approval of the self-insurance scheme of WFP and endorsed the Executive Director’s approval of a special account for self-insurance. New direct contributions to the Financial Management Improvement Programme (FMIP) could henceforth be applied to the implementation of this programme and the repayment of the 10 million dollar advance would be deferred until such time as FMIP had been fully funded. The Secretariat would propose a mechanism for the full funding of FMIP for consideration by the Board in 1999.
29. The Board took note of the “Report on Budgetary Performance, 1996–1997” (WFP/EB.3/98/4-C) and welcomed the detailed and informative contents of the document. It expressed its support for continued international cooperation, and an equitable balance and share of resources among regions, consistent with the decision of the Executive Board. For future reports of this nature, the Board looked forward to further enhancements in the way WFP’s budgetary performance is presented.
30. The importance of the work of the Office of the Inspector-General from August 1996 to December 1997 (WFP/EB.3/98/4-B) was stressed and the Board recommended continued collaboration and information-sharing with the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations, and other inspection and investigation services of the United Nations system.
31. The Chairman of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) was invited to attend the Annual Session of the Board, during which the members reviewed the document “Reports by the Joint Inspection Unit” (WFP/EB.A/98/7). The JIU had issued seven reports in 1997, four of which were of direct concern to WFP and the Executive Board, notably “Strengthening Field Representation of the United Nations System” (JIU/REP/97/1); “Execution of Humanitarian Assistance Programmes through Implementing Partners” (JIU/REP/97/3); “Coordination at Headquarters and Field Level between United Nations Agencies involved in Peace-Building: an Assessment of Possibilities” (JIU/REP/97/4); and “The Challenge of Outsourcing for the United Nations System” (JIU/REP/97/5). The Board recommended that the Bureau review future JIU reports and present its observations for the Board’s consideration.

EVALUATION REPORTS

32. In 1998, the Board reviewed a total of nine evaluation reports, of which four focused on development projects, three on emergency operations, and two on thematic issues. As is customary at its Annual Session, the Board also reviewed the “Evaluation Work Plan for 1998–99” (WFP/EB.A/98/5), which attempted to address the Board’s suggestion that an adequate balance be struck between the evaluation of development projects and that of emergency operations.



33. Recognizing that considerable efforts had been made on the following, the Board focused on:
- the continued need for the application of lessons learned to project design and implementation;
 - the need for greater focus on impact rather than on inputs and outputs;
 - the involvement of stakeholders and beneficiaries in the design of programmes and activities, so as to increase community and government ownership (although it fully acknowledged the additional cost implications of this recommendation); and
 - the continued need for improved targeting, monitoring systems and phase-out strategies, and close coordination with partners.
34. In response to the Board's suggestion that evaluations be undertaken in partnership with others, the evaluation of the Nepal Rural Community Infrastructure project was undertaken jointly with GTZ, the Great Lakes emergency evaluation was a tripartite exercise with the involvement of UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, and WFP and UNHCR jointly evaluated the implementation of emergency food assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

OPERATIONAL MATTERS

35. In 1998, ten Country Strategy Outlines (CSOs), of which six from the African Region, two from the Asia Region and two from Latin America and the Caribbean Region, were submitted to the Executive Board for review and advice, bringing the number of CSOs considered by WFP's governing body to a total of 41. The Board also examined and approved the Country Programmes for El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Niger and Senegal. A total of 20 Country Programmes (CPs) have thus been approved so far by the Executive Board.
36. With regard to both Country Strategy Outlines and Country Programmes, the Board decided that the Bureau of the Board, in consultation with the regional groups, would review standard formats for both types of document, taking into account the need for comprehensive strategies and a global perspective. Basic information would cover gross national product (GNP) per capita, trends in GNP per capita (in order to facilitate the assessment of possibilities for phasing out), the least developed country (LDC) and low-income, food-deficit country (LIFDC) classification, and a prioritization of activities. The issue of the inclusion of Direct Operational Costs, Direct Support Costs and Indirect Support Costs in Country Programmes should also be reviewed.
37. In addition to the CSOs and CPs, during the year the Board considered and approved a total of three development projects at a cost to WFP of \$25,788,402 to assist 849,000 people. The Board also approved one budgetary increase to an ongoing development project for a total of \$5,099,753 to assist 250,000 persons.
38. A further nine protracted relief and recovery operations were considered and approved, for a total of \$293,290,904, to deliver humanitarian assistance to 4,085,100 displaced and war-affected persons. A total of 576,230 tons of food was committed, at an overall cost of \$139,360,995.
39. Finally, the Board was informed of 12 development projects and 41 budget increases to ongoing development projects, and of six PRROs and 18 budget increases to PRROs as well as five basic activities within Country Programmes approved by the



Executive Director within her delegated authority during 1998.

40. The main thrust of the debate on operational matters centred on the integration of Country Strategies and Programmes in the UNDAF, the heightened need for enhanced collaboration with other United Nations partners, bilateral donors and NGOs, and for the ownership of the activities by the recipient governments. Support to activities targeted to women and a participatory approach were strongly supported by the Board, as were geographical and sectoral targeting. Improved monitoring was also emphasized, based on assessment indicators, which would also take into account the need to avoid disincentives for local production and displacement of markets.
41. At its Annual Session, the Board considered a report on “Local Purchases of Food and Non-food Items” (WFP/EB.A/98/8-B) and again expressed its support for local purchasing of food and non-food items, as well as for triangular transactions, as they are a key element for promoting the economies of developing countries. The Board cautioned the Secretariat on the possible positive or negative consequences of this type of activity on production, markets and local prices. In the light of this discussion, a study would be undertaken covering local purchasing processes in developing countries over a period of two to three years. The Board recommended the participation of WFP’s partners and United Nations and other organizations (FAO, World Bank, IFPRI) in this study.
42. During 1998, the Board was apprised of assistance provided by WFP to emergency situations around the world, in Africa (e.g. Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Great Lakes, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Tanzania), in Asia (the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea), and in Central America. The Board thus had the opportunity to seek clarification and provide guidance to the Secretariat on these important operations.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGERIAL MATTERS

43. As regards the composition of WFP international staff, the Secretariat presented its “Personnel Statistics Report as at 31 January 1998” (WFP/EB.A/98/8-A) to the Annual Session of the Board, which expressed satisfaction for the comprehensive nature of the information provided. The increased representation of women among the Professional staff was favourably commented on, particularly when compared with the general guiding principle that 40 percent of the international professional staff should originate from economically developing countries and 50 percent should be women.

OTHER DOCUMENTS

44. The Board commended the Secretariat for its presentation of the report “Gender Mainstreaming in WFP: an integrated assessment” (WFP/EB.2/98/9) and encouraged it to continue to give priority to this aspect of its regular work and, to the extent possible, to finance its activities in this area from the regular budget.



45. Information notes on the following areas of interest to the Board were provided in the course of 1998:

- UNICEF/WFP Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in emergency and rehabilitation interventions;
- List of MOUs and letters of agreement signed by WFP and other organizations/entities;
- Guiding principles on internal displacement;
- Advocacy;
- Statement of commitment of the Administrative Committee on Coordination for Action to eradicate poverty;
- Statement of commitment of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on gender equality and mainstreaming in the work of the United Nations system.

