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EMERGING ISSUES RELEVANT TO WFP

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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 point(s) indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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EMERGING ISSUES RELEVANT TO WFP

Introductory Note

1. At its Annual Session in May 1997, the Executive Board decided that in even-numbered years the Secretariat should prepare an Emerging Issues paper, which could serve as the basis for a forward-looking discussion of key issues. This document would highlight topics that merited discussion by the Board but that did not necessarily require the preparation of fully-fledged policy documents.
2. This paper reviews three issues:
 - Working with the military
 - Disease and food insecurity
 - Communications

WORKING WITH THE MILITARY

Background

3. The issue of civilian-military interaction has been and will continue to be a crucial one in terms of the effective and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance. In responding to natural disasters and conflict situations, WFP and its partners have gained a variety of experience working alongside different types of military forces, including:
 - United Nations missions (peace-enforcement, peacekeeping and military observer);
 - Alliance forces mandated by the United Nations;
 - Multi-national or regional forces not mandated by the United Nations;
 - Government armies in host countries; and
 - National military and civil defence units.
4. Additionally, negotiating with irregular military factions (whether rebel groups, militia or other armed groups) in order to reach affected populations has become a significant part of daily work for humanitarian staff. In hostile environments, humanitarian workers and peacekeepers can face similar challenges and dangers.
5. Last year's NATO intervention in Kosovo, the deployment of the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET) in East Timor and the more recent deployment of military and civil defence assets in Mozambique to assist with the flood response reflect the growing importance of the role the military plays in crises. Efforts are thus under way at the national, regional and international level, within and outside the United Nations, to renew the debate on the "right" civilian-military interaction in humanitarian interventions and to develop mechanisms for civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) in responding to emergencies. Typical areas for collaboration are provision of security arrangements, logistics support (especially truck and air transport) and, increasingly, training, planning and information exchange.



6. Although most humanitarian organizations share the concern that having “too close” a relationship with the military could compromise independence, neutrality and impartiality, it is generally recognized that the military is often the only organization that has the necessary resources, equipment and capacity for immediate action. Particularly in the first phase of a crisis, the military can provide vital assistance. In addition to large-scale logistics support, WFP has on occasion benefited from military food rations as a stopgap measure until the Programme’s own food aid pipeline could be ensured.
7. On the other hand, the civilian character of humanitarian operations needs to be preserved. Military involvement should not become a replacement for civilian efforts (e.g. undermining local transport capacity). Moreover, coordination between the humanitarian and military spheres needs to be achieved without distorting agencies’ identities or mandates.

WFP Experience

8. During a *conflict-related crisis*, support to WFP operations from military forces has focused on three main areas:
 - a) access for delivery (where the delivery of humanitarian assistance and United Nations peacekeeping operations coincide on the ground);
 - b) logistics (where the logistics requirements of an emergency are beyond the capacity of WFP and its collaborating partners); and
 - c) security (where the security of WFP staff and other partners is in doubt).
9. In response to *sudden-onset natural disasters*, the use of specialized service modules (e.g. long-haul trucking, field communications) and the integration in emergency operations of military and civil defence assets to augment existing logistics capabilities operations have been vital. In some cases, though, the cost of such assets has been high.
10. WFP has been an active participant in inter-agency discussions led by the Military and Civil Defence Unit (MCDU) of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to help define frameworks, doctrines and policy guidelines for improving preparedness measures and develop modalities for the use of military and civil defence assets. As part of the process of continuing to standardize the use of military assets for humanitarian missions, WFP will contribute to a review and possible revision of the framework document—the Oslo Guidelines.¹ Pertinent to this discussion is whether military and civil defence asset support should be limited to responses to natural disasters only or should include complex emergencies.
11. WFP welcomes recent calls for greater integration among peacekeeping, political, humanitarian and development components (and the respective institutional bodies in the United Nations) to ensure coherence in activities to achieve the common goals of peace

¹ Created under the auspices of the former Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the “Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief” (May 1994) normally referred to as the Oslo Guidelines. These guidelines are of a non-binding nature.



and security. Strong collaboration is particularly important in peace missions or post-conflict situations. From WFP's perspective, factors that can contribute to good cooperation with military peacekeeping elements in the field include:

- a) a mutual understanding of priorities (regarding physical access, protection and security), mandates and cultures;
- b) security for WFP facilities (warehouses, ports and convoys);
- c) timeliness (swift deployment of peacekeepers and military observers to field locations);
- d) a clear delineation of responsibilities (defined needs and tasks) and reporting lines, often facilitated by the appointment of a WFP Military Liaison Officer;
- e) regular and timely information sharing (on security issues and political developments in particular);
- f) sufficient geographical coverage and coherence of United Nations strategy; and
- g) agreement on the principle of sharing resources, where possible (i.e. in the implementation of demining and infrastructure rehabilitation activities or for medical evacuations).

Future Challenges

12. An emerging challenge is for humanitarian agencies and various forces to engage in a more structured dialogue so that military and humanitarian components gain a mutual understanding of mandates, cultures and perspectives. WFP will therefore continue to place importance on themes such as:
 - Preparedness and early warning;
 - Advocacy for inclusion of humanitarian support during the development of the peace mission mandate;
 - Joint mission and operational planning (to ensure early consideration of humanitarian concerns in peace negotiations and agreements);
 - Early demobilization and reintegration programming;
 - Information sharing and military liaison (through CIMIC, establishment of civil-military operations centres or exchange of liaison officers);
 - Joint training (to refine and enhance collaboration); and
 - Logistics and telecommunications (to lessen the competitive use of limited infrastructure and capacities and to ensure common services).
13. In consultation with other major operational agencies, WFP will continue to take stock of its experience in working with different types of military forces and follow the evolving discussion on civil-military interaction in inter-agency fora. WFP welcomes efforts to improve standard operating procedures for humanitarian agencies and the military working together both at the strategic level and in the theatre of operations.



DISEASE AND FOOD INSECURITY

14. Disease, poor nutrition and food insecurity interact in numerous ways, in a downward spiral that is difficult to reverse: an estimated 50 percent of disease-related mortality among infants could be prevented if infant malnutrition were eradicated; the “programming” of a number of chronic diseases in adults starts with malnutrition during pregnancy; disease and a lack of appropriate food contribute to child malnutrition; poor nutrition and illness reduce an adult’s ability to work and contribute to family income and food security. And on and on. Debilitating disease is a “livelihood shock” that pushes a poor household from vulnerability into chronic food insecurity.
15. For millions of poor families, the shock comes from tuberculosis (TB). The dimensions of the TB epidemic are chilling: TB kills 2 million people each year; someone in the world is newly infected every second; one third of the world’s population is currently infected with the TB bacillus.
16. Although nutritional status has little or no effect on the risk of being infected, there are two ways in which food aid can help to break the link between TB and household food insecurity. The first is to enable TB patients to seek, and encourage them to complete treatment, which takes at least 6 months. The WHO-recommended treatment for TB produces cure rates of up to 95 percent, even in the poorest countries. Unfortunately, many patients decide to discontinue treatment when they begin to feel better. From a public health perspective, an incomplete treatment of TB is worse than no treatment at all, allowing a seemingly well but uncured patient to infect other people. Each person with active TB will infect an average of 10 to 15 people every year. To make matters worse, incomplete treatment often allows the bacilli in uncured patients’ lungs to develop a resistance to anti-TB drugs, a resistance that is passed on to all the people they infect.
17. But attendance at a health clinic involves time, effort, a loss of wages and costs for transportation—all a burden on extremely poor patients. Experience has shown that food assistance enables and encourages patients to complete the full course of TB treatment, much as WFP-supported feeding projects enable poor mothers to bring their young children to mother and child health (MCH) clinics. By enabling TB patients to complete their treatment, food aid can contribute to the health of individual patients, spare others from infection and help combat multi-drug-resistant strains.
18. According to WHO, food assistance to families of TB patients can reduce the risk of children developing the disease by improving their nutritional status. While good nutrition has little or no effect on the risk of being infected, it does have a significant influence on the likelihood of an infected person developing TB. Food provided to families may also reduce the risk of developing TB for children by improving their nutritional status. This is yet another benefit of food-aid-supported activities designed to ensure good nutrition in childhood.
19. Another factor that drastically increases the likelihood that infection with TB will lead to actual illness is HIV. HIV and TB form a lethal combination, each speeding the other’s progress. There is no evident role for food aid in breaking this linkage, or in halting the spread of HIV in any other direct manner. What food aid can do is enable families affected by HIV/AIDS to take advantage of development opportunities and invest in a better future—in spite of the devastation brought on by the disease—in the ways agreed upon by the Executive Board through the Enabling Development policy. However, new research needs to be conducted to understand better what role improved nutrition can play in contributing to a fuller and more extended period of activity.



20. AIDS is destroying the most productive sector of the population in many of the countries in which WFP works. Infection rates are particularly high among young adults, who constitute the bulk of the working force and the current generation of parents.
 - Because of deaths of the main wage earners, children and young adults drop out of school to help support the family.
 - By the end of 1999, there were an estimated 11.2 million AIDS orphans.
 - The number of female-headed households is growing, particularly those headed by older women or grandmothers caring for several orphans.
 - A family with a case of AIDS experiences a dramatic decrease in income (i.e. savings are drained and assets are sold). Studies in Côte d'Ivoire and Thailand, for example, showed decreases of 52 to 67 percent.
 - As adults in rural areas fall sick or are debilitated by poor health and are unable to tend their farms, agricultural productivity drops dramatically.
 - Household resources are often diverted towards care for the sick and meeting the costs of medical care.
21. When HIV/AIDS results in school absences, difficulties in providing care and nutrition for children, the loss of meagre assets or the inability to produce enough to feed the family, food aid has a role to play (just as it does when crop failure or unemployment have the same effects). Often, the role of food aid should be to enable development by helping affected households invest in adequate nutrition and education for children, including those orphaned. In other cases, it may permit healthy family members to retain or gain assets that contribute to the family's income.
22. Cambodia offers an interesting example of a "no cost" way in which WFP works with partners (UNAIDS and UNESCO, in this case) to create HIV/AIDS awareness. Food-for-work project openings are used as occasions for the dissemination of public health messages through the use of shadow puppets and performances in the style of traditional Khmer theatre, financed by UNESCO. In this way, an estimated 4,500 families are reached.
23. The human and economic damage wrought by HIV/AIDS and TB is of such tragic proportions that it cannot be ignored. The emerging challenge for WFP in playing its part—in ways consistent with its mandate and the policy direction established through Executive Board approval of the Enabling Development policy—will be for the Programme to remain aware of the relationship between food insecurity and disease. Also, there will be a need to develop indicators that capture this reality. Related to this is the need for WFP to pay more attention to the interstices of disease, nutrition and food security in discussions with partners (especially in the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF)) and in thinking through country strategies. The interaction between nutrition and HIV/AIDS will be explored next year in a symposium organized by the ACC Sub-Committee on Nutrition. The outcome of this symposium will be helpful in influencing future WFP HIV/AIDS-related programmes. A final challenge is for WFP to balance the urgency of the problem with due diligence in response; the Programme does not have long years of experience with such activities. Before getting involved in HIV/AIDS-specific projects, WFP must take particular care to learn as it goes, drawing upon its expanding experience and that of its partners.



COMMUNICATIONS

24. Developments in digital technologies over the last five years have resulted in a host of changes and “technological accelerations”. Multi-media networks integrating satellite technologies, satellite radio, the Internet and public networks relaying up-to-date messages from remote field offices have broken down geographical barriers. Virtual working groups, with people discussing important issues across continents, have already opened up great opportunities.
25. Serving 88 million people in 82 countries, WFP requires an extensive information and telecommunications network to coordinate its feeding and complex logistics operations. From the headquarters in Rome, liaison offices in Geneva and New York, to the remotest areas in Mozambique, Afghanistan or East Timor, where there is no public infrastructure to rely upon, information must be delivered in a timely, secure and cost-effective way.
26. This challenge is being met through the utilization of available resources wherever possible and through the customization or development of specific information and telecommunications systems. The result is a multi-media network, based on a combination of the widest range of wired and wireless means. These include standard systems based on land lines, integrated voice and data satellite networks, and the extensive use of radio systems in remote centres, all integrating seamlessly to create one of the largest humanitarian communication networks in existence today.
27. These developments to have had tremendous impact on WFP’s communications systems worldwide. Specifically, they have supported a more integrated approach to decision-making, more effectively linking headquarters, regional and country offices. They have also provided a strong impetus for WFP to:
 - develop its own communication solutions in several areas. The Deep Field Mailing System is a good example. Developed in Africa’s Great Lakes during the crisis in Rwanda, this messaging system operates over HF radios, can run independently from electrical power sources, can be mobile and is user-friendly. So useful and cost-effective, its concepts have become a standard for the humanitarian community and have been replicated by several commercial operators all over the world.
 - develop capacity to mobilize its teams within 24 hours of a declaration of an emergency and immediately set up the communication infrastructure necessary for food delivery—and often rescue—operations. Thanks to its emergency stand-by teams in Africa, Asia and Rome, WFP’s information technology and telecommunications technicians have been among the first to arrive when an emergency has occurred. This has guaranteed rapid communications with operations centres and offered an efficient instrument for the security of WFP personnel who are often exposed to high-risk situations and whose safety is topmost priority for the Programme.
 - offer its communications platform, where possible, to other international agencies and NGOs involved in emergency operations. Most recently in Mozambique, WFP was officially appointed by OCHA as the lead agency for inter-agency information technology and telecommunications. The Programme successfully installed communications offices in five locations with major concentrations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and provided other agencies with the platform for sending e-mail. WFP is rapidly gaining recognition from other international agencies and NGOs for its information and telecommunications capacity.



- provide sustainable and continuous support to the monitoring of the food needs situation on the ground. For example, the Commodity Tracking System has increased WFP's capacity to monitor food aid stocks and their movement, and thus help ensure that aid reaches the intended beneficiaries.

Opportunities

28. As the United Nations Secretary-General stated in his Millennium Report "We the Peoples", there is enormous scope for improving efficiency in the use of technology and for a closer involvement of communities across the globe in humanitarian concerns.
29. Some of the opportunities are:
 - *Advocacy.* Recent experience with the Hunger Site has shown the remarkable capacity of Internet technology for harnessing the goodwill of people around the globe. Individuals with access to Internet can click once a day, thus triggering a donation from corporate sponsors. This is only the beginning. There are many other ways that the Internet can increase awareness of the hungry poor throughout the world.
 - *Resourcing.* Continuing to develop links with the commercial sector and strengthening both corporate and community support for the ideals of the Programme are two resource opportunities.
 - *Security.* Strengthening security arrangements through swift messaging systems—for both voice and data—will enhance security awareness and be a more efficient response tool.
 - *Decentralization.* Information technology has already done a great deal to strengthen the overall management network, bringing field office locations "closer" to headquarters and vice versa. Future system integration will be greatly enhanced through the introduction of new management information systems.

Emerging Challenges

30. The challenge facing the international community is to now ensure that information technology be mainstreamed into all facets of WFP's work.
31. However, keeping pace with emerging technologies and being able to pinpoint those that may be appropriate for WFP is an enormous challenge. A further issue is the need for uniformity and compatibility among agencies in their adoption of systems and networks.
32. Another challenge that lies ahead is working with nation states to gain broader acceptance for the use of advanced communication systems in accordance with the June 1998 Tampere Convention.