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THEMATIC EVALUATION OF WFP-NGO PARTNERSHIPS

ABSTRACT

Field reviews were carried out in eight countries to examine the comparative advantages of WFP and its non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, and to gain a better understanding of benefits and constraints within partnership arrangements. In the context of both development projects and relief operations, it was noted that complementary capacities and resources had been combined to effectively realize common objectives. NGOs complemented WFP assistance with other essential inputs and capacities, thus facilitating the use of food aid as a resource to enable development. The country studies confirmed several comparative advantages of NGO partners, including familiarity with local conditions, innovative approaches, and research and training capacities. WFP food aid procurement, logistics and coordinating capacity, and vulnerability analysis and mapping (VAM) expertise constituted its comparative strengths. Some factors were recognized as constraints to partnership, such as limited or no involvement of NGOs in programming, WFP reporting formats and procedures, inadequate cost-sharing and cost-recovery arrangements, and irregular donor funding.

The evaluation confirmed that WFP depends on collaboration with NGOs since it cannot fully rely on government bodies as implementing partners. Partnership is often the only feasible option or the best choice for WFP. WFP-NGO partnership is not confined to filling gaps in government capabilities, but is justified on its own merits. Partnership between WFP and its NGO partners is not intended to by-pass government authorities. Moreover, an environment of good working relations with government at different levels is a necessary precondition for effective WFP-NGO collaboration. The evaluation team recommended that partnership between WFP and NGOs be further expanded and new areas of cooperation explored.

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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LIST OF ACRONYMS USED IN DOCUMENT

| | |
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| AFRICARE | African Reinsurance Corporation (Washington, USA) |
| CBO | Community-based organizations |
| CRC | Cambodian Red Cross |
| EMOP | Emergency operation |
| FFW | Food for work |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| ITAD | Information Training and Agriculture Development |
| MCH | Mother and child health care |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| OEDE | Office of Evaluation |
| SAP | Structural adjustment programmes |
| SP | Strategy and Policy Division |
| VAM | Vulnerability analysis and mapping |



INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Objectives and Scope of Evaluation

1. As a United Nations agency, WFP cooperates with national government authorities as its primary partners. Yet there are situations and conditions under which this partnership cannot be fully relied upon or is ineffective in realizing WFP's mandate and priorities. Therefore, from its inception, WFP has collaborated with other partners, such as United Nations sister agencies, donor organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Partnerships with NGOs have significantly increased in recent years¹, calling for a systematic review of the reasons, features and experiences of such cooperation.
2. WFP's experience of working with partners has been presented in two recent papers, focusing on partnership in the context of WFP-assisted development projects². Cooperation with NGOs in relief situations is, however, growing and deserves due attention, considering the possible implications of the transition process from relief to development for WFP-NGO partnership.
3. Taking the earlier partnership studies as a starting point, and expanding the coverage to relief operations, this evaluation of WFP-NGO partnership is based on field reviews of eight country situations³. These field based reviews aimed to verify the current status of actual cooperation between WFP and its NGO partners. They also contributed to a better understanding of potential benefits and limiting factors of WFP-NGO collaboration within the relief-development-continuum.
4. The following main objectives were set for the evaluation:
 - a) To examine the comparative, mutual advantages of WFP and NGOs in the context of partnerships that have been forged to plan, implement and possibly evaluate joint interventions concerning development projects and relief operations.
 - b) Based on the evaluation findings, to submit recommendations oriented towards providing new perspectives and further strengthening of the partnership, to the mutual benefit of both sides, with the ultimate aim of increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of joint interventions.
5. A number of key issues were to be examined, such as the areas and nature of WFP-NGO collaboration, the perception of this partnership by different parties (including host

¹ The results of a survey undertaken in 1998 (Delphine Borione, 1998) showed that WFP had cooperated with an estimated 1,120 NGOs world-wide—250 international and 870 national and local NGOs. In 1989, their total number was only 300. (cf. WFP, Partnership with NGOs, Dec. 1998.)

² The October 1998 paper '*Establishing effective partnership for food aid projects*' by SP (Strategy and Policy Division/WFP Rome) and ITAD (Information, Training and Agriculture Development consultancy firm, United Kingdom) explored the rationale for partnerships with multilateral, bilateral donors and NGOs. Partners' perceptions of collaborating with WFP were discussed, as well as ways through which the enabling role of food aid for development could be strengthened. The SP document '*Partnership with NGOs*' (WFP/EB.1/99/3-A) was presented to the first session of WFP's Executive Board in 1999, and examined the main trends in WFP-NGO partnership. It also indicated how the benefits of working with NGOs could be maximized and advocacy opportunities developed.

³ Afghanistan, Cambodia, Chad, Egypt, El Salvador, Gaza/West Bank, Nicaragua and Tanzania.



governments and donors), criteria applied by WFP for the selection of NGO partners, complementarity of approaches, capacities and resources, the extent to which WFP-NGO partnerships have been formalized, the efficacy of WFP-NGO partnership with regard to needs assessment, beneficiary targeting, gender mainstreaming, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, the cost implications of the partnership, and the extent to which partnerships have been adjusted to changing conditions.

Method

6. The evaluation was planned and managed by the Office of Evaluation (OEDE) in consultation with the Strategy and Policy Division (SP). The countries covered by the evaluation were selected in coordination with WFP's regional and country offices. The geographical coverage of the evaluation was to include countries in different regions⁴ and at different stages of development, where collaboration with NGOs in both relief and development activities was significant and could serve to illustrate how WFP-NGO partnerships function in practice⁵. The country case studies were conducted by a team of four consultants, each one covering two countries within the same region⁶. Following a briefing at WFP Headquarters, the field studies took place during July/August 1999, and the team members met again in Rome (September 1999) for post-mission consultations and de-briefing.

REASONS FOR WFP TO PURSUE PARTNERSHIPS WITH NGOS

7. Food assistance is only one of several inputs needed to tackle food security problems. In realizing its mandate and priorities, WFP depends on collaboration with partners to complement food aid with organizational and technical capacities and essential non-food inputs in order to effectively plan and implement emergency operations and development projects. National government authorities, WFP's primary designated partners, are not always able or prepared to fulfil these functions. This may be due to the sudden occurrence of major disasters, the sheer dimensions of problems to be tackled, and/or constrained government capacities and resources. Based on the country studies, the following factors were found to limit the capacity of national governments:
- i) Conflicts, civil strife and their consequences (Afghanistan, Cambodia, Gaza/West Bank), post-conflict situations (Chad, El Salvador), refugee influx (Tanzania);
 - ii) Major sudden natural disasters (Hurricane Mitch in El Salvador and Nicaragua, droughts and El Niño floods in Tanzania, droughts in Chad);

⁴ Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Middle East and Central America.

⁵ The Annex provides an overview of the WFP-NGO partnership situation in the selected countries.

⁶ The two sub-Saharan African countries, Chad and Tanzania, were covered by Ms Soheir Morsy, the two Middle East cases, Egypt and Gaza/West Bank, by Ms Rita Cauli, the two Central American countries, El Salvador and Nicaragua, by Ms Marilee Karl, and the two Asian countries, Afghanistan and Cambodia, by Manfred Metz who also acted as team leader. Ms. Yuriko Shoji from the Office of the Executive Director participated in the Cambodia mission, and Mr. Abraham de Kock from OEDE joined towards the end of the mission. Due to visa and security problems, the Afghanistan case study was conducted from Pakistan where the WFP Country Office for Afghanistan is located and most of the NGOs operating in Afghanistan are based.



- iii) Prolonged adverse climatic conditions in combination with meagre economic and/or natural resources endowment (Afghanistan, Cambodia, Chad, Gaza/West Bank, Tanzania);
 - iv) Political-economic transformation and ongoing structural adjustment programmes (SAPs).
8. Most of the countries had been simultaneously affected by more than one of these factors which further constrained governments' coping capacities and their ability to provide the necessary counterpart contributions to WFP's interventions.

Box 1: Government capacity constraints induce WFP-NGO partnerships—Chad

WFP assistance to Chad over a period of three and a half decades has included both development projects and emergency operations. Recent years have witnessed a marked reduction in the amount of food aid provided by WFP, resulting in the termination of rural development and health sector development activities. This is attributed to "management problems" related to the government's inability to honour its counterpart obligations. The government's limited operational capacity is manifested throughout all levels of national bureaucratic structures, from the capital down to the sub-prefecture level. This constraint seriously hinders the implementation of WFP development projects that rely on the government as the primary partner.

Chad's 30 years of civil war have seriously compromised the country's infrastructure and WFP is confronted with the problem of inadequate implementation capacity at the national level and related difficulties in project monitoring at the local level. This affects the gathering of reliable data in general (whether for baseline use, or for impact assessment of WFP intervention), and gender disaggregated data in particular. WFP Chad has also faced problems with local authorities in applying its beneficiaries selection criteria, even when these criteria were established by the government's own technical services. Faced with such problems, the Country Office decided to consider "alternate means of execution", which include forging partnerships with NGOs and bilateral or multilateral organizations.

9. Complementing government operations or filling gaps, NGOs often operate in certain sectors or locations not covered by government services. Under such circumstances, WFP pursues partnerships with them as there is virtually no other alternative⁷. Furthermore, WFP-NGO partnerships can yield synergetic effects in terms of increased effectiveness and efficiency by making good use of complementary capacities and resources. This value added reinforces the rationale of WFP-NGO collaboration alongside government interventions, even in countries with a strong government presence. In fact, WFP-NGO partnership does not, and should not, mean by-passing national government authorities. It has proved to be particularly effective in countries where the government has a basic positive attitude towards NGOs and acknowledges WFP-NGO collaboration as a strategic element and integral part of national development endeavours.

⁷ Contrary to the Chad experience, there are also examples where, in line with increasing government capacities, partnership shifts from NGOs to national government authorities. This applies, for example, to Cambodia. After the new post-war government was established, the Ministry of Rural Development and its provincial departments became WFP's major implementing partner in food-for-work recovery operations that were previously implemented with NGOs.



NATURE AND FIELDS OF WFP-NGO COLLABORATION

10. The past two decades have witnessed the proliferation of a variety of voluntary associations, summarily labelled as "non-governmental organizations" (NGOs). World-wide, these institutions of civil society are involved in a broad range of activities, including formulation and implementation of development programmes (e.g. enhancing food security, encouraging girls' education and supporting improvement of health and nutrition), promotion of human rights (including women's rights) and democratization through the strengthening of community-based organizations (CBOs), as well as monitoring the activities of national governments and international development agencies.
11. By assuming responsibility for alleviating economic hardship and promoting social justice through mobilization of, and partnership with, local communities, NGOs have prompted due recognition of their influence by national governments, multilateral development agencies and bilateral aid donors. Recognized as both advocates and providers of essential services world-wide, NGOs' share of resources has steadily increased, even in cases where total aid transfers have been declining. Presently, NGOs deliver more official development assistance than the entire United Nations system, excluding the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Non-governmental organizations are also responsible for channelling about one-third of global food aid. In 1998, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan described NGOs as "indispensable partners" of the United Nations in preventive diplomacy, humanitarian work, development and in promoting human rights.
12. NGOs differ in size, capacity and focus. Correspondingly, the areas of cooperation, the role of the NGOs in the partnership and their contributions vary considerably, also determining the type and scope of contributions expected and required from WFP. Partnerships with NGOs have taken many forms, depending on the different level of cooperation (at global, national and field level), type of NGO partners (international, national and local NGOs; their properties, mandates, capacities and ranges of activity) and area of cooperation.

Partnerships at Global, National and Field Level

13. WFP has established partnerships with NGOs at different levels, comprising:
 - a) partnerships at global level, through annual consultations and the establishment of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with major international NGOs at headquarters level;
 - b) partnerships at country level, with respect to collaboration in major or country-wide programmes of food assistance;
 - c) collaboration in the context of specific projects and activities at field level.
14. The annual WFP-NGO consultations and the global MOUs were introduced in 1995, to enhance the policy dialogue between WFP and its major NGO partners, and to set up a general framework for collaboration at global level.
15. The partnerships at country and local levels are often formalized by bilateral MOUs or agreements between both partners, particularly if some kind of resource transfer is involved. Sometimes there exist tripartite agreements, including government authorities or other partners (such as United Nations agencies or donor organizations), although multiple



bilateral agreements are more common in cases where more than two partners are involved. Parallel bilateral agreements among different partners involved in the same operation may render transparency on each partner's obligations and coordination more difficult. The partnership studies in the various countries covered confirmed that at the field level, global MOUs merely serve as a general framework for establishing partnership between WFP and NGO partners. For programming and implementing joint activities, it is necessary to further specify the mutual roles and responsibilities through project-level agreements.

16. Moreover, apart from formalized partnerships, there are many fields and facets of informal relations and ad hoc forms of cooperation among WFP, NGOs and other partners, especially in creating public awareness on food and nutrition problems, information exchange, workshops on common issues of concern (e.g. gender, nutrition, food security and emergency preparedness), and in achieving timely and coordinated response in cases of sudden emergencies.

Characteristics of NGO Partners

17. WFP's NGO partners comprise:
- a) major international NGOs with world-wide operations and access to substantial funding resources and professional capacities;
 - b) minor international NGOs with regional or country and problem/issue-specific orientation (e.g. refugees, human rights, child welfare, women, war victims, handicapped and the urban or rural poor);
 - c) national NGOs, as well as local NGOs, including community-based organizations, acquainted with the local conditions and operating at grass-root level.
18. There exists a wide spectrum of other types of NGOs, such as secular and religious-based organizations, NGOs which are primarily advocacy, charity or development-oriented, NGOs which are strongly affiliated—or opposed—to ruling governments, etc. All such aspects need to be carefully considered by WFP when selecting suitable NGO partners, matching the specific operational needs with a well-suited NGO in terms of, for example, complementary resources, organizational and technical capacities, government approval, proximity to beneficiaries and participatory approaches. Much more caution is required in selecting suitable NGO development partners, since some NGOs appear to be anything other than independent, non-profit, "grass-roots" or organizations with high ideals⁸.
19. In most of the countries visited, local, national and/or international NGOs have formed coordinating bodies or umbrella organizations, fulfilling information, coordination, capacity-building and/or lobbying functions for their members. Occasionally, international NGOs serve as intermediary or umbrella organizations for national and local NGOs. Such umbrella bodies have been shown to have facilitated WFP-NGO collaboration; sometimes they directly act as WFP's NGO partners.

⁸ Hence the terms GONGOS (government-organized NGOs), DONGOs (donor-organized NGOs) or BINGOs (business interest NGOs).



Range of WFP-NGO Collaboration in Relief and Development

20. Proceeding from and centring around the core issue and main purpose of WFP-NGO partnership, namely combining complementary capacities and resources in interventions aiming at effectively reaching common humanitarian and development objectives, WFP-NGO collaboration ranges from problem identification, advocacy and needs assessment up to monitoring and evaluation. The initiative for seeking partnership may come from either side, based on the type of problems and tasks to be performed, the self-perception of capacities and limitations, and the recognition of the necessary complementary capacities and resources offered by the respective partner. The actual nature of WFP-NGO collaboration depends on the type of programme activities and specific country and local conditions.
21. In the case of *emergency relief operations*, when large amounts of food and other relief items have to be handled, WFP's main tasks are to mobilize the relief food required, and arrange for its transport and rapid availability in the areas of need, while NGOs are commonly concerned with local level targeting, and final delivery and distribution. Apart from this typical division of tasks, both partners usually collaborate in assessing relief food requirements, setting targeting criteria, determining the composition of relief rations, and designing the distribution modalities, based on WFP's global experience in these tasks and NGOs' knowledge of local conditions. Sometimes, WFP assigns NGOs with logistical capacities to carry out food transport operations as, for example, in Cambodia, where all relief food is handled by the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC)⁹, or in the emergency operation (EMOP) in Nicaragua after Hurricane Mitch¹⁰. While NGOs rely on WFP as provider of relief food, they have to mobilize other necessary relief items (tents, blankets, medical supplies, tools, installations for drinking water supply, etc.) from other sources, and they have to have a monitoring capability.

Box 2: WFP-NGO collaboration in the emergency operation after Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua

NGOs played a major role in Nicaragua under the Central America EMOP 6079.00—"Emergency food aid to people affected by Hurricane Mitch". WFP distinguished between "logistics NGOs" and "food-for-work (FFW) NGOs" that cooperated in the distribution of emergency food aid. Because of the magnitude of the emergency caused by Hurricane Mitch, WFP signed agreements with large NGOs and other institutions with the logistical capacity to transport and distribute large amounts of food. These included the American Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Catholic Relief Services, ALISTAR (a private Nicaraguan development organization) and Save the Children Fund (SCF), USA. In addition, a number of NGOs which had been WFP's partners in rehabilitation/food for work before were also involved in food distribution.

22. WFP-NGO partnership in *development programmes* is more complex and diversified. The forging of partnership requires, at the outset, delineation of the priority areas of concern for each partner. WFP's general priority concerns are identified in the 1999 'Enabling Development' document, focusing on the enabling role of food aid in the following programme priority areas:

- i) Enable young children and expectant and nursing mothers to meet their special nutritional and nutrition-related health needs;

⁹ In Cambodia, the WFP Country Office has an agreement with the CRC on food aid logistics between WFP's warehouses and final distribution points. CRC operates WFP's transport fleet and receives a flat-rate refund per transported ton.

¹⁰ See Box 2.



- ii) Enable poor households to invest in human capital through education and training, for example by enhancing primary school enrolment, particularly of girls, and by promoting training and literacy courses for women to acquire skills for self-reliance and self-empowerment;
 - iii) Make it possible for poor families to gain and preserve assets;
 - iv) Utilization of food aid to mitigate the effects of natural disasters in disaster-prone areas;
 - v) Enable households that depend for their living on degraded natural resources to shift to more sustainable livelihoods.
23. Across the countries surveyed, WFP and NGOs collaborate in all fields mentioned above, such as:
- a) Mother and child health care (MCH) and nutrition programmes.
 - b) Primary education and school feeding programmes.
 - c) Skills training and literacy programmes, particularly for women of poor urban and rural households, as well as for other vulnerable groups (e.g. handicapped, war and mine victims and street children).
 - d) Food-for-work programmes, serving the dual purpose of providing immediate short-term employment and income opportunities to poor and vulnerable population groups, and creating productive assets in infrastructure and natural resource conservation.
 - e) Recovery and rehabilitation programmes for people affected by natural disasters or conflicts, often including food for work and other forms of food assistance.
 - f) Community development programmes in poor and remote rural communities, usually combined with food-for-work schemes and other forms of food assistance (e.g. grain banks, seed supply or nutrition).
24. The spectrum and intensity of WFP-NGO collaboration vary by country. Among the countries surveyed, WFP-NGO collaboration is most comprehensive in Cambodia and rather limited in Egypt, while the other countries range somewhere in between. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, WFP-NGO collaboration in recovery and rehabilitation operations increased substantially due to the Hurricane Mitch emergency operation. In Afghanistan, where NGOs are the major WFP partners in relief operations, the scope for effective development initiatives is extremely limited due to the political situation. A comparative overview of the characteristics and main features of WFP-NGO collaboration in the countries surveyed is presented in the Annex.
25. The volume and share of WFP's food aid contribution to the total resource requirements and programme costs of development programmes vary substantially but are generally lower than in emergency operations. Nevertheless, food aid resources often constitute an essential component of these interventions, by directly addressing critical issues of insufficient access and availability of food for the target population, and by providing an incentive to participate in programme activities. On the other hand, the interventions can only be effective and food aid can only play its enabling role,
- a) if food aid is complemented by other necessary inputs;



- b) if the necessary management and technical capacities for planning, implementation and monitoring are in place; and
 - c) if the target communities and beneficiaries actively participate in programme design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
26. In WFP-NGO partnership collaboration, these issues are generally taken care of by the NGOs.
27. The evaluation of WFP-NGO partnerships confirmed the comparative advantages of each side and the complementarity of their resources and capacities. Their collaboration permits expansion of the scope and scale of operations, and more effectively reaching common humanitarian and development objectives. Box 3 presents an interesting example of such collaboration.

Box 3: Bringing hope to children at the garbage dump—WFP-NGO partnership in Cambodia

WFP food aid is being used in Cambodia in a number of innovative ways. In the social sector, WFP has been implementing a variety of unique assistance interventions to support protection of and advocacy for the most vulnerable groups. Given the post-conflict situation of the country, the projects cover multiple areas, such as rehabilitation of mine victims; shelter and vocational training for women victims of domestic abuse, as well as girls rescued from brothels; children in orphanages; and street children assisted by specialized NGOs. In Phnom Penh, one small NGO is assisting around 750 children who make a living for themselves and their families by picking garbage at the city collection dump. It is hazardous, unhygienic and dangerous work, where children between the ages of 6 and 15 sift through the heaped refuse for recyclable plastic and cardboard as well as something to eat, with their bare hands and feet, competing with the iron rakes of grown-ups and skirting the dumping trucks. They are often buried to their knees in the refuse which includes glass, wire and chemicals, and engulfed by a nauseating stench. Children who gather at early hours without having eaten face dizzy spells in the blazing heat. With the help of the NGO 'Pour un Sourire d'Enfant', some of the children with large gaps in education have been enrolled in a school run by the organization to learn to read and write, basic mathematics, a basic knowledge of their own culture, and are given clean clothes and food. Some children abandoned by their families are taken as boarding students. To compensate for their lost 'income' through garbage collection, a small sum of money was given to children's families. Now the money has been replaced by WFP-provided food, appreciated by families who do not need to purchase staples, as well as having a stabilizing effect for children's education. Children who are obliged by their families to continue picking garbage are fed on the spot each morning, so that they can have at least one healthy meal each day. A shelter has been built where the children can rest when the temperature soars, where they have access to clean water for drinking and washing. A mobile clinic has been set up to treat children for minor injuries and illnesses. More serious cases are referred to a hospital. The director of the project explains that it is not only practical education that they try to provide to children, but also ethical and moral education, so they do not need to resort to violence, to steal, rape and kill, as had been the heritage of their parents' generation. Also, the NGO has been able to assist and look after children subjected to abuse: minors who are physically abused by parents and step-parents for not bringing in enough income, or being forced into sex labour, by patiently working with both children and their parents. Sometimes it has been necessary to provide shelters for these children. WFP supplies food to the boarding school students and to the wet feeding of young garbage pickers at the dump site, consisting of rations of rice, vegetable oil and canned fish.

COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGES AND MUTUAL BENEFITS

NGOs' Comparative Advantages—Benefits for WFP in Working with NGOs

Familiarity with Local and Socio-Cultural Conditions

28. Through their 'grass-root' approaches, long presence in local communities and locally-recruited personnel, NGOs are able to establish and maintain close working relationships with local communities. They have intimate knowledge of local particularities



and conditions. Due to this familiarity, NGOs are usually aware of what is happening in the field, what is needed there, and are able to judge which approaches are feasible and the most appropriate to be applied. This competence is essential for food aid needs assessment, for effective local-level targeting, and for designing and implementing food aid interventions well-adapted to prevailing local conditions and the socio-cultural environment.

Operating in Remote Areas with Difficult Access

29. In many countries there are areas which, due to their remoteness and difficult accessibility, are hardly reached by government services. Frequently, such areas belong to the poorest of the country where food aid is most needed, and they are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity in case of disasters, as marketing and communication links are very weak. NGOs are often the only organizations present there, which can provide data and information on the food situation and organize food distribution to beneficiaries.

Participatory Approaches

30. Community participation in selection, design, execution, monitoring and evaluation of development activities is a prerequisite for their acceptability, effective and efficient implementation, and sustainability. It contributes to increased self-confidence, management capacities and sense of ownership among target beneficiaries and communities. Many NGOs have demonstrated their commitment and ability to encourage and mobilize community participation, particularly in community-managed targeting, in deciding on priorities and in the way activities are organized and carried out. Community participation in monitoring and evaluation is generally less developed, although NGO linkages with community organizations have the potential to facilitate community participation also in this regard.

Innovative and Flexible Approaches

31. NGOs often show a higher degree of readiness and flexibility than most host governments in trying unconventional and innovative approaches, in taking up issues that have been neglected or ignored (e.g. street children, child abuse or mine victims)¹¹, or in finding and adopting suitable approaches to solve technical and socio-economic problems.

Provision of Complementary Inputs

32. Food aid can rarely stand alone. In order to be effective, it usually requires complementary inputs. This holds true for relief operations, and even more so in developmental use of food aid, when tools, building material, equipment, teaching material, facilities, etc. are required for implementation. WFP's resources to cater for 'non-food items' are rather limited, generally confined to covering the costs related to food deliveries up to final distribution. NGOs usually supply the required complementary inputs, mostly by accessing and tapping other donors' sources.

¹¹ See, for example, the case of garbage-collecting children in Phnom Penh, Box 3.



Technical and Management Capacities

33. NGOs have the capacities to arrange final food delivery and manage food distribution. In food-assisted development programmes, they also provide the technical and management capacities required to plan the works to be done, and to manage and supervise implementation (engineers for infrastructural works, medical doctors, nurses and nutritionists for MCH and nutrition programmes, agronomists for agricultural projects, environmental assessments, etc.).

Low-Cost Operations

34. NGOs generally operate at relatively low costs, due to their use of simple, low-cost technologies, employment of local staff and volunteers, streamlined services and moderate overhead costs, although there are also large differences, particularly between international NGOs and national/local NGOs. However, while the international NGOs usually cover their overhead costs from other sources, national and local NGOs often depend on contributions from WFP to cover their overhead costs. Experience has shown that selecting NGO partners merely on the basis of low-cost considerations is not always the most cost-effective solution.

Box 4: Cost consideration when selecting a partner—the Chadian experience

In the course of identifying implementing partners to assist in a drought relief operation in Chad in 1996, WFP approached the African Reinsurance Corporation (AFRICARE) which had a long experience in relief operations in the Sahelian region. However, due to disagreements about cost-budgeting, negotiations with AFRICARE were terminated and WFP chose another NGO willing to serve as implementing partner at lower costs. This NGO, however, did not live up to its contractual obligations resulting not only in increased risk to the population threatened with famine, but also in additional costs to WFP, which eventually had to assume responsibility for the logistics operation.

Advocacy Concerning Nutrition, Food Security, Gender and Humanitarian Issues

35. Most NGOs share with WFP common concerns and objectives regarding nutrition, food security, gender and humanitarian issues, and are highly committed to giving them due attention in their work. Many NGOs particularly emphasize such issues in their operations, e.g. by organizing workshops and by launching publicity campaigns.

Research and Training Capacities

36. In many countries, there are national and international NGOs with considerable research and training capacities in areas which are particularly relevant to WFP's work, e.g. nutrition surveys, household surveys, early warning systems, needs assessment, institutional development, project planning, management, monitoring and evaluation.



WFP's Comparative Advantages—Benefits for NGOs

Provision of Food Aid for Relief, Recovery and Development

37. Food provided by WFP often represents a major, if not the main, resource used by NGOs in carrying out relief, recovery and development work. It enables them to directly respond to the immediate food needs of their target population, and to use other resources available to them to finance supporting and complementary inputs. As a result, NGOs can intensify or expand their scope of operations.
38. WFP food assistance is a critical incentive for people to participate in NGO projects, such as food-for-work, rehabilitation and development programmes, school feeding, MCH programmes, and literacy and vocational training programmes for women. In times of disasters and during reconstruction following disasters, WFP food assistance permits continuation of ongoing NGO programmes.

WFP's Food Aid Procurement and Logistics Capacity

39. Governments, NGOs and other organizations can rely on WFP's capacity to quickly mobilize, procure and efficiently channel/deliver large amounts of food aid when the need arises. This is a significant asset, particularly in emergency situations and for countries prone to recurring disasters.
40. To procure food aid commodities in the most efficient and effective way, WFP has increasingly turned to local procurement, if the market situation allows this. Local food purchase has added advantages. It contributes to strengthening the local food marketing system and provides incentives for increased domestic food production, and further positive effects for rural development programmes and overall food security.

WFP's Experience in Food Assistance and Management

41. In collaborating with WFP, NGOs can draw on WFP's global and specific country experience in food assistance and management, referring to issues such as food needs assessment, food logistics and management, food store management, management of food distribution, determining of food rations, emergency food aid operations, planning and implementation of food-for-work schemes, and monitoring and evaluation of food aid programmes.

WFP's Coordinating Role in Matters of Food Security and Food Aid

42. Based on its role of being *a*, in some countries *the*, *major source of food aid* supplies, WFP often assumes overall advisory, coordination and information functions in matters of food aid and food security. The WFP Country Office keeps records of overall food aid flows and operations in the country, participates in crop and food supply assessment missions, organizes related workshops, and is consulted on matters of food security and food aid by the government and its authorities, donors, other United Nations agencies, and NGOs.

Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Capacity

43. VAM has become a major activity in many countries, carried out by WFP country offices. Based on systematic methods of data collection, VAM provides information on areas of poverty and vulnerability to food insecurity. This information is used, also by



NGOs, to identify priority areas of intervention. Often NGOs actively participate in the VAM exercise by conducting baseline surveys, survey updates, or through data and information exchange. This, in turn, contributes to building up planning and research capacities in the country in general, and with NGOs in particular.

Capacity-Building

44. WFP recognizes local capacity-building as a precondition for sustainable development and offers its partners opportunities to improve their organizational know-how and planning, implementation and monitoring competence. This is done through organizing training workshops and seminars, and through the direct working relationship between both partners, by instructing NGOs to adhere to WFP procedures and standards in their operations (e.g. in regard to targeting, accounting and reporting).

Gaining Recognition and Credibility

45. Experience gained in collaboration with WFP as a United Nations agency is seen as an additional qualification of NGOs and helps them establish their reputation as credible and competent organizations in the eyes of the government and other United Nations and donor agencies.

WFP's role in Mediating and Improving Relations between NGOs and Government

46. There are governments which have a critical, sometimes negative, attitude towards NGOs and their work. By collaborating with both sides and linking them through common operations, WFP has repeatedly and successfully functioned as mediator. The experience in some countries shows that WFP is playing an important advocacy role in building mutual trust and forging cluster cooperation between governments and NGOs.

CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS IN WFP-NGO PARTNERSHIPS

47. In spite of the comparative advantages of each side and the complementarity of resources and capacities, there are also weaknesses and constraints that limit the feasibility, effectiveness and scope of WFP-NGO collaboration. The following major and typical constraining factors were identified through the various field surveys:
- a) Possibilities for effective WFP-NGO cooperation are limited in countries where there exists *mistrust and little cooperation between the government and NGOs*, and where, due to deficient legal framework, *NGOs are arbitrarily curtailed in their activities by government authorities*¹². The critical attitude of governments towards NGOs is sometimes nurtured by the fact that, in competing for external donors' resources, they may feel they are being 'crowded out' by NGOs.
 - b) NGOs, particularly small national and local NGOs, often perceive their relationship with WFP not as cooperation among equal partners, with shared rights and obligations, but rather as a *donor-recipient* or *contractor-client* type of relation.

¹² Although WFP's role as mediator can help to ease the situation, see previous paragraph.



- c) WFP-NGO collaboration is often confined to the phase of implementation, whereas NGO partners are *less involved during programming and planning stages*. This is true even in countries where WFP's country programmes depend heavily on NGO collaboration.
- d) WFP procedures: in collaborating with WFP, NGO partners reported about their experience with lengthy decision-making processes on the WFP side, hampering effective operations in the field. In their eyes, this was due to overly bureaucratic and centralized procedures. This perception was partly caused by NGOs' lack of familiarity with the administrative framework under which WFP as a United Nations agency has to operate. It was found that NGOs are not always sufficiently aware of WFP's policies, principles and procedures. This refers to issues such as WFP's central mandate, food aid concepts in relief, recovery and development, targeting criteria and methods, monitoring, reporting requirements, as well as WFP's own operational constraints (no firm commitments by its donors, limited resources for complementary non-food inputs, etc.).
- e) Between NGOs there are *large differences in terms of competence, reliability and credibility*. Some NGOs appear to be anything other than idealized or supposedly independent, altruistic, non-profit, humanitarian or 'grass-roots' organizations. Selection of suitable NGOs partners can prove rather difficult for WFP.
- f) *NGOs usually depend on donor funding which is often unreliable or irregular*. Problems arise when NGOs do not receive their funding from donor agencies as planned, because they then cannot provide the complementary inputs at all, or in time.
- g) *WFP depends on voluntary funding that sometimes leads to delays in food deliveries*, which place the NGOs in a difficult position in relation to beneficiaries.
- h) *Frequent changes in the expatriate staff* of WFP, as well as international NGOs, usually at highest executive levels with major decision-making power, can disrupt continuity in WFP-NGO collaboration.
- i) Many NGOs find WFP's *reporting formats* too complicated, difficult and time-consuming to complete.
- j) *Cost sharing and cost recovery* are sometimes not satisfactorily regulated in the eyes of NGO partners and are frequently the subject of disputes between WFP and NGOs.
- k) Some NGOs are not prepared or able to adapt their approaches to changing conditions, particularly during transition from relief to development.
- l) Local-level agreements often are not comprehensive enough to sufficiently cover concerns of both parties.

MAJOR CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

48. Overall, this evaluation confirmed the vital importance of WFP-NGO partnership at the field level. It underlined that WFP, to effectively fulfil its mandate, cannot rely exclusively on government authorities as its implementing partners, but must also depend on collaboration with NGOs. In fact, partnership with NGOs proved to be in some cases the *only feasible option*, in other cases the *better choice*, for WFP to effectively accomplish its



mandate. WFP-NGO partnership can be an absolute necessity in countries with poor infrastructure and weak governmental administrative capacities.

49. The various case studies demonstrated that WFP-NGO collaboration is not confined to filling gaps left by insufficient government capacities, but is justified on its own principal merits, also in countries and regions with a strong government presence. WFP-NGO partnership does not, and should not, mean by-passing government authorities. On the contrary, it has proved to be particularly effective in countries and situations where there exist good working relations among all three parties.
50. The complementarity of WFP and NGO resources and capacities yields the added advantages of increasing the efficiency of resource use and the effectiveness and scope of their interventions. This applies to relief operations, development interventions and also recovery operations under post-emergency conditions, when people are still highly vulnerable to food insecurity but need to be enabled to become self-reliant.
51. Due to its own dependence on funding by donors and their fulfilment of commitments made, WFP cannot always make firm commitments to its partners, and is sometimes unable to provide planned food allocations. This creates critical uncertainty both for WFP and its NGO partners, frustrating proper planning efforts and effective implementation of joint projects and operations.
52. Although the overall status of partnership between WFP and NGO partners can be qualified as satisfactory, there is scope for strengthening this collaboration. Building on the confirmed comparative advantages of each partner and by alleviating the identified constraints, WFP country offices are recommended to continue and further expand their partnership with NGOs, exploring new areas and form of collaboration.
53. In doing so, WFP and WFP country offices in particular are advised to pay particular attention to the following issues.

Coordination Arrangements

54. Coordination is particularly crucial in cases when more than two partners (government, international NGOs, local NGOs, WFP, other United Nations or donor agencies) are involved in the same project or operation. Sometimes parallel bilateral agreements exist (e.g. WFP-NGO, WFP-government, NGO-government) which are not fully compatible and transparent to all partners involved. In such instances, coordination could be improved through concluding *tri-or multipartite agreements* which define the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved.
55. Government authorities are in a position to enable WFP/NGO projects and operations, even though they may not be directly involved as partners. WFP should therefore establish, maintain or strengthen good working relations with governments at different levels (national, province, district and local), pursuing open information exchange and dialogue.
56. Joint WFP/NGO programming should be undertaken from the earliest stage of the project cycle. Experience shows that effective partnership starts at the appraisal stage.
57. *Intensification of coordination and improvement of data and information exchange* among government, relief, development and research organizations, bilateral donors and other agencies concerned with food aid and food security programmes in the country.



Promoting Policy and Advocacy Role for NGOs

58. WFP should encourage *participation of NGO partners* in deliberations on *national food security policy matters*, particularly in countries and cases where WFP itself assumes a central role in food aid coordination and food policy formulation.
59. *Expansion of WFP-NGO partnerships* beyond service-oriented NGOs, so as to also include local research and human rights organizations, social movements, etc., such as feminist or peasant organizations.
60. *Encourage NGOs to more intensively cooperate and to form partnerships among themselves*. This may comprise consortia or umbrella organizations among national NGOs, or international NGOs functioning as an umbrella or mentor for national and local NGOs.

Building Local Capacity

61. *Capacity-building measures*, particularly for local NGOs and community-based organizations, should be intensified, drawing on national expertise, existing institutional capacities and training institutions, as well as international NGOs present in the country. Training courses may be planned and organized together with NGOs, other United Nations agencies and donor organizations in the country. The need for further training of WFP's own national staff, particularly in such fields as community development, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques, project cycle management, monitoring, etc. could be catered for by intensifying joint training courses with large international NGOs.
62. *In order to familiarize the local partners with WFP's policies, priorities and procedures*, special familiarization seminars should be organized for NGOs and, in some cases, WFP's own field staff. Where such information exchanges are already taking place, they should be broadened and repeated.

Establishing Clear Selection Criteria

63. A set of qualification criteria should be developed to facilitate selection of suitable NGO partners and making them transparent to NGOs. Qualification criteria should also include capacities and commitments to engage in capacity-building activities for local NGOs and community-based organizations. Doors should be kept open for new NGO partners, for example by offering capacity training to their management and staff, and/or by entrusting them with the execution of initial small-scale tasks and closely monitoring their performance.
64. Resorting to a track record of experience in working with WFP is not always practicable and appropriate. Over-emphasizing the track record as a selection criterion excludes other qualified NGO partners from entering into partnership with WFP.

Adopting Flexible Financial and Management Tools to Facilitate NGO Involvement

65. Cost-sharing arrangements with NGOs should be specific to the requirements of different types of joint interventions (relief, recovery, rehabilitation or development), giving due consideration to the resources and capacities required for effective implementation and possible contributions by NGO partners. These arrangements also relate to the issue of sharing overhead costs. In this respect, it should be noted that the cheapest alternatives for WFP do not necessarily yield the most cost-effective solutions.



66. *Improved reliability in terms of volume and timeliness of budgetary resources and inputs supply.* Given the fact that WFP and NGOs depend on donors' contributions and their discipline to adhere to their commitments, WFP and NGOs should seek from their donors improved arrangements, ensuring reliability and timeliness of resource availability. Furthermore, WFP itself and NGOs should make continued efforts to improve their internal efficiency in making the required inputs available in time (streamlined administrative procedures, communication links between headquarters, country offices and field, logistics).
67. Beyond efforts already undertaken, WFP should continue to further improve administrative procedures with respect to *decentralization of decision-making processes and flexibility*. For example, provisions should be made to allow for greater flexibility regarding budgetary allocations for 'non-food items' and their use for different purposes, according to specific local requirements.



ANNEX

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| MAJOR FEATURES OF COUNTRY CASES COVERED BY EVALUATION OF WFP-NGO PARTNERSHIPS |
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| Country | Country characteristics and main features of WFP-NGO collaboration | Number of NGO partners (by category) | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|------------------|---------------|-------|
| | | International NGOs | National NGOs | Local NGOs | Total |
| Afghanistan | Continuous civil for 20 years, no recognized government, high number of refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), restrictive policy on women. Substantial WFP-NGO cooperation, mainly in emergency relief and vulnerable group assistance. | 23 | 35 | 0 | 58 |
| Cambodia | Structural adjustment programme (SAP), transition after 30 years of civil war, high number of refugees, returnees and IDPs. Good example for comprehensive WFP-NGO collaboration in transition from relief to development. | 48 | 25 | 38 | 111 |
| Chad | SAP, post-conflict (after 30 years of civil war), prone to recurrent droughts. WFP-NGO collaboration in relief and development. | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Egypt | SAP, close cooperation with international NGO, although not formalized by agreement. Scope for further WFP-NGO partnerships in certain fields. | 1 | 0 | 5 | 6 |
| El Salvador | Post-conflict, post-emergency (Hurricane Mitch), large income disparity. WFP-NGO collaboration in emergency relief, recovery and development. | 7 | 6 | 7 | 20 |
| Nicaragua | SAP, post-conflict, prone to natural disasters. WFP-NGO collaboration in Hurricane Mitch emergency operation, recovery and development | 17 | 53 | 17 | 87 |
| Palestine - Gaza - West Bank | Israeli occupation and border closures, political transition. WFP-NGO collaboration in vulnerable group assistance and skill training for women. | 1 | 1 | 15 | 17 |
| Tanzania | SAP, prone to natural disasters, refugee influx from neighbouring countries. WFP-NGO collaboration in VAM, emergency operations and rural development. | 9 | 5 | 0 | 14 |

Sources: WFP-NGO Partnership evaluation country reports

