

برنامج  
الأغذية  
العالمي



Programme  
Alimentaire  
Mondial

World  
Food  
Programme

Programa  
Mundial  
de Alimentos

**Executive Board  
Third Regular Session**

**Rome, 19 - 22 October 1999**

## **ORGANIZATIONAL AND PROCEDURAL MATTERS**

### **Agenda item 9**

***For consideration***

**E**

Distribution: GENERAL  
**WFP/EB.3/99/9-B**  
16 September 1999  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

## **LOOKING FORWARD: HUMANITARIAN POLICY CONCERNS FOR WFP**

This document is printed in a limited number of copies. Executive Board documents are available on WFP's WEB site ([http://www.wfp.org/eb\\_public/EB\\_Home.html](http://www.wfp.org/eb_public/EB_Home.html)).



## BACKGROUND

1. Approximately 75 percent of the Programme's resources are currently directed to emergency and protracted relief and recovery operations. Although many of these are conflict-related, increasingly, emergency food aid is being provided to respond to the effects of natural disasters, or to a combination of environmentally and conflict-induced crises. Working conditions for aid workers have also changed dramatically over the last decade.
2. WFP has been grappling with associated institutional, policy and operational dimensions, and their implications for programming. Fundamental issues and constraints related to security and access, identification of beneficiaries and their needs and effective use of resources have arisen as concerns for WFP, its partners and donor governments alike.
3. Much of WFP's current humanitarian policy agenda relates to its participation in the various working groups of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). The protection of civilians in armed conflict with particular attention paid to internally displaced persons, the humanitarian impact of sanctions, and linking relief and development have been prominent themes. In addition, WFP plays an active role in the Sub-Working Group on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance, co-chairing it with UNICEF. The IASC's endorsement of a policy statement on the integration of a gender perspective in humanitarian assistance has represented progress in mainstreaming this issue.
4. While continuing to contribute to inter-agency policy work, WFP's Policy Service has begun to devote more attention to humanitarian matters. Future work will build on the *Thematic Study of Recurring Challenges in the Provision of Food Assistance in Complex Emergencies* (WFP/EB.3/99/4/3) which provides an overview of salient issues relating to WFP's experience in conflict situations and makes a number of recommendations for follow-up action.
5. Improvements will be made on existing systems as a result of the new policy directions regarding the best uses of food aid for development. These will have important implications and spin-offs for all WFP's work. Of particular relevance will be work on targeting, needs assessment and vulnerability analysis; participatory approaches; and monitoring and evaluation processes. Appropriate tools will be developed for different types of emergencies, including natural disaster and conflict situations as well as recovery.
6. This paper identifies a number of current humanitarian challenges and issues requiring policy consideration by WFP. Not every issue will call for a conventional policy paper. Some matters may appropriately be handled through the "Emerging Issues" discussion every other year. In other cases, brief notes or background papers may be presented to the Board to provide information and offer the Board an opportunity to give guidance. The timing of such papers will be determined as events evolve, thinking develops and other issues arise.
7. Whenever possible, WFP will build on policy work already undertaken by partner agencies, conduct joint reviews with other organizations, and contribute to initiatives coordinated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).



## TAKING STOCK: CURRENT HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES

8. **Changing environment.** It would have been impossible to predict the numerous and wide-ranging dramatic disasters that struck in the eighties and nineties—from El Niño to mass forced displacement and genocide. Protracted and dangerous conflict situations, often necessitating management of operations from neighbouring countries, are now unfortunately prominent features of humanitarian crises.
9. Another phenomenon is the double devastation wrought in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan, where traditional community-coping mechanisms for responding to earthquakes, floods and drought have been eroded by successive years of war. The likelihood of rapid environmental degradation and global climatic change as the root causes of future food crises has become a major consideration.
10. **New causes of crisis.** Recently, relief agencies, including WFP, have been requested to intervene with “emergency” operations as a result of essentially economic or financial crises which have been exacerbated by natural disasters and/or social unrest, for example in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and Indonesia. The macro-economic issues at stake, as well as the emergence of new groups of food-insecure, have presented WFP with new challenges.
11. International relief agencies must consider how to support the most vulnerable in order to stem further decline, and for how long. Defining who are the most vulnerable at different stages of an operation and distinguishing between “new” and “old” target groups are becoming increasingly complex. Questions about when emergency food aid assistance should end or graduate into recovery or development assistance are vital considerations, as is how to develop criteria to measure impact. At the same time, there is increased acknowledgement that the role of humanitarian assistance in cases where the root causes are largely economic or political can only be limited.
12. **Applying principles is proving difficult.** “Humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality”.<sup>1</sup> But more and more parties to conflicts, less access to civilian victims and less security for humanitarian personnel make the field application of these principles increasingly complex and difficult.
13. Humanitarianism as a concept is being challenged not only by blatant and wilful disrespect by warring parties of international humanitarian and human rights law. Interpretations and debate about neutrality and impartiality also abound and have sometimes led humanitarian actors in different directions. Often there has been tension between those who give highest priority to saving lives and delivery of assistance, and those who advocate closer linkage of delivery of assistance to human rights issues. The matter has been further complicated by consideration of longer-term goals of capacity-building and sustainability. The interface between humanitarian and political military interventions may involve additional complications.
14. **Unhelpful labels.** The distinction among emergency, rehabilitation and development activities is blurred and rather artificial. The meaning of humanitarianism has also been broadened to include notions of peace-building, human rights, rehabilitation and development initiatives aiming at longer-term poverty alleviation.

<sup>1</sup> From General Assembly resolution 46/182 of December 1991.



15. The challenge for WFP remains the need to focus on what is the best strategy to blend life-saving relief interventions with longer-term development activities. The replacement of the category of Protracted Relief Operation (PRO) with that of Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) in 1998<sup>1</sup> was a clear acknowledgement that recovery and development objectives should be integrated into the design of relief operations at a very early stage.
16. Maximum flexibility in programming is required given the fluidity of protracted relief operations and the possible recurrence of instability, population displacement and natural disaster. As a result, WFP has increasingly been planning and operating on a regional basis to enable more flexible and cost-effective allocation of staff, food and cash. Since the first regional emergency operation was initiated in early 1995 for the Great Lakes programme, regional humanitarian operations have been introduced in the Liberia/Sierra Leone region, and last year in response to Hurricane Mitch in Central America.
17. **Unintended consequences.** There has been increased debate about the impact of humanitarian assistance, particularly in prolonged conflict situations. In addition, there is the issue of the possible misappropriation and diversion of aid supplies to warring parties. This concern resurfaces repeatedly in Afghanistan, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan.
18. At each stage of programme design and delivery, WFP, together with its partners, needs to minimize negative local impact and ensure that the aid goes to those for whom it was intended. Having said this, certain practical compromises or trade-offs might be necessary in conflict situations and “complex political emergencies”. In other cases, suspension of aid or disengagement might be the only justifiable course of action left.
19. **Coordination.** The number of organizations involved in humanitarian assistance has burgeoned. Much time is now invested in coordination mechanisms for planning, programming and managing overall assistance to countries in crisis. WFP will continue to actively promote the development of common programme and policy approaches through the IASC, taking as its starting point that the fundamental challenge for all organizations is to work better within existing agreements, mechanisms and guidelines rather than to create yet more frameworks or fora for coordination.
20. **Resource availability, the role of the media and humanitarian advocacy.** An enormous disparity in funding of relief and recovery needs has become apparent. With a decline in multilateral contributions, there is rising concern about consistent and across-the-board coverage of assessed needs. This phenomenon can and does create a shortage of funding for certain operations which are not considered to be a high political priority or of economic or strategic importance by Member States.
21. Media coverage of high-profile interventions, such as of recent events in the Balkans, will, as and when they happen, overshadow humanitarian crises in other parts of the world. A major challenge for relief agencies is to seek ways in which to encourage informed media coverage of priority needs in less visible emergency situations.
22. Humanitarian advocacy requires engagement also on such important subjects as respect for international humanitarian and human rights law; unimpeded access for food needs assessment, aid delivery and follow-up monitoring; and the safety of WFP staff and their colleagues in the relief community. Recent examples of advocacy by the Programme

---

<sup>1</sup> As proposed in “From Crisis to Recovery” (WFP/EB.A/98/4-A) presented to the Board in May 1998.



include the involvement of the Executive Director in a briefing to the Security Council on the acute humanitarian crisis in Angola and the participation of WFP in the OCHA-led process of drafting the report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict.

## LOOKING FORWARD: PROPOSED AREAS FOR ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### Policy work has been planned in the following areas:

23. **Internally displaced persons.** In recent years, internally displaced persons (IDPs) have constituted a major category of beneficiaries for the Programme, not only during the period of displacement, but also during their return. A review of WFP's extensive involvement in providing food aid to the internally displaced is now under way. The countries selected for study represent a wide range of situations: populations affected by conflict and natural disaster; urban and rural settings; and phases from acute crisis to protracted relief and resettlement, reintegration and recovery. The review will draw lessons from and identify best practices in relation to IDP food needs assessment and targeting, programme design, food aid distribution and monitoring.
24. The development of a normative framework for the protection and assistance of IDPs, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,<sup>1</sup> and of an IASC policy paper on the protection of IDPs, have helped to focus the attention of humanitarian agencies on the importance of strengthening the linkages between protection and assistance. The country studies undertaken in the review will offer an opportunity for dialogue with WFP field staff on the challenges of operationalizing the Guiding Principles. The review will also examine WFP's collaboration with governments, United Nations, non-governmental and other humanitarian partners in addressing the assistance and protection needs of IDPs. Emphasis will be placed on how such cooperation might be further strengthened.
25. **Humanitarian access.** Lack of or intermittent access, normally coupled with insecurity, is one of the most common constraints in the emergency environment. Continuous and unrestricted access for regular and systematic needs assessments, the provision of assistance and related protection and follow-up monitoring is usually a prerequisite for WFP intervention. Questions of access and safe passage of food assistance relate directly to issues of respect for international humanitarian and human rights law. They also relate to other critical issues, such as staff and beneficiary security, sovereignty, and donor interest and funding.
26. Over the years, WFP and others have engaged on an ad hoc basis in negotiations on access and safe passage for humanitarian supplies with governments and non-state actors in order to reach targeted beneficiary groups. WFP is reviewing the principal strategies adopted (or supported by it) to secure access for its emergency and protracted relief operations over the last decade. The review will cover situations where WFP has

<sup>1</sup> The Guiding Principles On Internal Displacement are based on existing instruments in international humanitarian and human rights law. Compiled by a team of international lawyers, they were presented by the Representative of the Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in April 1998. WFP presented them to the Annual Session of the Executive Board in May 1998 (WFP/EB.A/98/INF/5).



negotiated on its own behalf and where the negotiations have been carried out by another United Nations entity on behalf of the humanitarian community.

27. The review aims to consolidate good practice for future operations and explore alternative strategies to secure access. Furthermore, it will allow WFP to contribute practical examples of its particular experience to planned IASC discussions about negotiating humanitarian access. Issues for consideration include the possible difference between access for food deliveries and access for humanitarian deliveries and/or protection activities in general. Also, the point at which concerns over the personal safety and security of WFP staff precipitate a suspension needs to be examined.
28. **Disaster mitigation.** Early prevention and preparedness measures combined with improved response capacities can help to reduce the impact of recurrent natural disasters. Building on the decision regarding “Enabling Development” taken by the Board at its Annual Session of 1999 (decision 1999/EB.A/2), WFP is developing approaches to include disaster mitigation activities within recovery and development assistance programmes. Case studies have been undertaken in Bangladesh, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Ethiopia and Malawi.

#### Other topics deserving of attention are:

29. **Economic crises.** While protracted conflict and natural disasters (often in conflict areas) are by now familiar to WFP staff, the implications of “economic shocks” leading to a food crisis and the creation of a new class of poor are less familiar. Urban families have limited and very different coping mechanisms in relation to rural populations. It is appropriate to start exploring what role WFP might play and what kind of intervention strategy WFP should adopt in assisting these groups. Work previously undertaken by WFP and others on safety nets should be examined for lessons which may be relevant.
30. In some cases it may be fitting for WFP to play a service role—not necessarily delivering WFP food but assisting a government in relief planning, logistics, and in vulnerability analysis and mapping. Appropriate funding modalities would need to be considered.
31. **Humanitarian impact of sanctions.** WFP participates in the Inter-Agency Technical Group on the Humanitarian Impact of Sanctions which has, through OCHA, been providing updates to the Security Council on a number of issues relating to the humanitarian impact of sanctions. These include the need to consider targeted financial sanctions as an alternative to broad trade sanctions; the need for more effective assessments and monitoring in relation to the humanitarian impact of sanctions (particularly on vulnerable groups); and the importance of streamlining and making more effective procedures related to the management of exemptions for humanitarian supplies.
32. Continued inter-agency dialogue is required to assess how all IASC members might best support OCHA to meet the Council's expectations that they play an expanded role in support of the work of established sanctions committees. Of particular interest to WFP is the introduction of simplified procedures in requesting humanitarian exemptions in order to facilitate programme implementation.
33. WFP will continue to support the work of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and OCHA to sustain advocacy with the political organs of the United Nations on issues related to the humanitarian impact of sanctions.
34. **Human rights, humanitarian principles and codes.** Last year’s anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights highlighted the fact that human rights are



indivisible and interdependent; the full enjoyment of one depends on the realization of the others. Similarly, human rights cannot be separated from humanitarian action and development. No agency can do the work alone—it is an inter-agency responsibility to support states in ensuring that fundamental rights to decent living conditions, food, basic health care and education are realized.

35. Over the last five years, a number of charters, codes, protocols and standards based on humanitarian principles have been put in place with the overarching aim of improving the quality and accountability of disaster response. In large part, these have been stimulated by the dilemmas posed by operating in conflict situations but also by the move towards “rights-based approaches”.
36. WFP will continue to follow discussions relating to integrating human rights concerns in everyday relief work and review the implications of adopting various humanitarian protocols and codes. Upholding the humanitarian principles of universality and neutrality, safe and unimpeded access, prohibition of discrimination, gender balance, full participation of civil society and empowerment of beneficiaries are of particular importance to WFP.
37. **Promoting local capacity through broad-based participation.** The concept of supporting local capacity and using participatory approaches in relief and recovery activities has gained currency over recent years. But coming to grips with the challenges of capacity-building in recovery situations, and identifying the options for ensuring people-centred participation, is not easy. It entails far more than training and the channelling of resources through local committees, organizations or local authorities.
38. An understanding of people’s coping mechanisms in response to shocks, whether man-made or natural, is an essential first step, as is greater attention to evolving market situations. Vital experience has been gained by WFP, for example, through women’s participation in grass-roots committees and by working with women as agents of change. This experience needs to be reviewed and refined to identify what works and is feasible in emergency situations.
39. Further, it is necessary to be clear at what point, and in which contexts, in both post-conflict and natural disaster recovery, different types of capacity-building and participatory approaches are appropriate.
40. Finally, along with other agencies, WFP will need to consider what activities might foster reconciliation and long-term recovery, and whether WFP food has a role to play.
41. **Partnership.** “.....*The only viable route in coming years is through solid collaboration among agencies, government, civil society (particularly NGOs), and communities themselves. Partnership is the key to future successes, partnership based on prevention where possible, sound preparedness where feasible and rapid and effective response where all else fails.*”<sup>1</sup> Building on the ideas outlined in “Partnership with NGOs”,<sup>2</sup> the concept of cooperation and partnership needs to be broadened and made more comprehensive and operational.
42. Likewise, the relevant expertise of other types of organizations should be more systematically explored. These include the Bretton Woods institutions, service package providers, and academic and policy institutions.

---

<sup>1</sup> From the Proceedings of the WFP Africa Regional Seminar, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 5–9 February 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Presented to the Executive Board in January 1999 (WFP/EB.1/99/3-A).





43. **Interface with the military and peacekeeping.** An important issue which emerged during the international response to the crises in Rwanda, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia and more recently in Kosovo, is how should humanitarian agencies work with military and peacekeeping operations mandated to support humanitarian interventions. In several instances, humanitarian relief efforts would have failed outright without dedicated military support.
44. Determining the “right” level of interaction and agreeing on the mechanisms for coordination between the military and relief community remain concerns, particularly regarding the perceived independence and impartiality of humanitarian agencies. WFP experience, like that of other agencies, has been varied but considerable benefit has been derived in particular from substantial military donations of resources, logistics capacity and expertise, and security information. Such donations and support were critical to the success of a number of WFP operations, most notably in Kosovo. Further analysis is needed to consolidate lessons learned from past experience.

---

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

45. During the coming biennium, WFP will devote greater policy attention to humanitarian issues such as those outlined above. Not all the topics will require a conventional policy paper. In some cases, brief information papers could serve to update the Board on the issues affecting the Programme’s humanitarian work and provide the opportunity for an exchange of views.
46. The Board is invited to provide comments as to whether it wishes to consider papers on these or other matters of humanitarian policy.

