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Operational matters

For consideration

Executive Board documents are available on WFP's website (<http://executiveboard.wfp.org>).

Comprehensive update on the Myanmar Country Strategic Plan (2018–2022) in view of recent developments

Executive summary

This comprehensive update focuses on WFP's response to the evolving situation in Myanmar since the approval of the Myanmar Country Strategic Plan (2018–2022) by the Executive Board in November 2017. Following the recent security events, the country strategic plan provided the flexibility needed to launch an integrated response to emerging needs in Rakhine State, where WFP continues to ramp up its operations, reaching 160,000 people in January 2018. Food distributions are taking place at a relatively slow pace due to constraints faced by partners. WFP stands ready to work with the authorities and other actors to assist everyone in need, including potential returnees, based on humanitarian principles. Restricted humanitarian access has hampered WFP's operations not only in Rakhine State but also other conflict affected areas of the country. WFP continues to carry out nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive food assistance with greater focus on national capacity strengthening, cash transfers and gender-transformative programming.

Draft decision*

The Board takes note of the comprehensive update on the Myanmar Country Strategic Plan (2018–2022) (WFP/EB.1/2018/6-D) in view of recent developments.

* This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Board, please refer to the decisions and recommendations document issued at the end of the session.

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1. Operational framework

1. Myanmar's five-year country strategic plan for the period 2018–2022 (CSP) was approved by the WFP Executive Board on 15 November 2017. With the CSP formulated before the outbreak of violence in Rakhine State on 25 August, and in the absence of adequate verified information on the affected food-insecure population, the Executive Board requested a comprehensive update for its consideration.
2. Early donor support totalling USD 14.5 million enabled WFP to kick start the CSP on 1 January 2018. Under the CSP WFP has continued to implement nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive food assistance with greater focus on national capacity strengthening and cash and gender-transformative programming. Recent violence in Kachin, Shan and Rakhine states put at risk the already tenuous food and nutrition security of the most vulnerable communities in the country. The CSP has provided the flexibility needed to augment support and provide an integrated response, especially in response to newly emerging needs in Rakhine State, where the bulk of WFP assistance is channelled.
3. WFP reinforced its commitment to working with the Government of Myanmar for the overarching goal of achieving zero hunger by 2030. While the Government has facilitated visa extensions for international personnel in Yangon and allowed the appointment of a second WFP international staff member in Maungdaw in the northern part of Rakhine State, progress in some other aspects of the partnership remains slow. WFP continues to face delays with the finalization of a new memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Government as a legal framework for the implementation of the CSP. The absence of an MoU complicates interactions with the authorities, among other things delaying the processing time for travel authorizations for national and international staff and transport permits.

2. Crisis response

2.1 Rakhine State

4. **Food security situation.** After the violence of 25 August, WFP still does not have a comprehensive picture of food insecurity in Maungdaw District. Some things are known, however. Movement restrictions for local and particularly Muslim populations, for example, are preventing people from reaching some of the fields and fishing areas that are their main sources of livelihood and food, which has had a negative impact on food and nutrition security. According to a recent quarterly global early warning – early action report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), a large-scale displacement from Maungdaw District to Bangladesh and lack of access to food and fuel are compounding food insecurity in Myanmar (and Bangladesh), leaving vulnerable people at high risk.
5. In central Rakhine State, restrictions on movement and lack of access to livelihoods continue to leave the majority of Muslim internally displaced people (IDPs) reliant on external humanitarian assistance as their sole means of survival. New restrictions on livelihoods and movements of Muslim communities, such as inability to obtain fishing licences and local curfews, are observed. Reduced labour, increased wage rates and decreased harvests are noted in ethnic Rakhine communities.
6. **Targeting.** Since the outbreak of violence in August 2017, no United Nations organizations have been allowed to carry out any needs assessments in Maungdaw District. WFP has, however, been able to adjust its beneficiary caseload by using beneficiary lists provided by the authorities and the Red Cross Movement, evidence of household registration and informal contacts with key informants during distributions. The revised lists have been shared with the Government's Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine State and other actors to maximize coverage and avoid overlaps. In January 2018, the local authorities authorized WFP to conduct a beneficiary targeting exercise. The Government has also recently requested FAO and WFP to conduct a crop and food security assessment mission in Rakhine State, which is expected to begin in March 2018.

7. In central Rakhine State, WFP plans to pilot an IDP profiling exercise in selected camps by late 2018, aiming to provide assistance based on vulnerability rather than IDP status alone. Such a community-based profiling exercise would result in the classification of households into four vulnerability categories: “none”, “low”, “medium” and “high”. WFP would provide measured assistance to the IDPs falling within the “high” and “medium” categories. Unconditional food assistance would be discontinued for those in the “low” and “none” categories. As new IDPs are resettled and relocated by the Government, WFP will consider assistance for households that meet the vulnerability criteria.
8. **Food distributions.** Since WFP regained access to Maungdaw District on 6 November 2017, monthly food distributions have resumed in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships. WFP is currently the only United Nations organization with day-to-day access in the deep field. At the request of the authorities and due to sensitivity regarding United Nations assistance in Rakhine State, WFP food is distributed in plain packaging. Distributions are carried out by one local and one international non-governmental organization (NGO) partner under WFP oversight. WFP international staff have been able to visit certain villages in Maungdaw District to monitor ongoing activities. In January 2018, WFP assisted 39,000 people, including 5,700 pregnant and lactating women and 1,400 children under 5, in 96 Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu villages. While WFP has been operational in Maungdaw District, access constraints continue to prevent the full resumption of humanitarian services that were being provided by other actors before the August violence. Unfettered and sustained access for all humanitarian actors remains essential to the provision of a comprehensive integrated response to the urgent needs of the affected people. WFP is committed to moving to longer-term solutions to food insecurity, such as school meals, as part of the new way of working approach when circumstances allow.
9. In central Rakhine State, security concerns and fear of retaliation by ethnic Rakhine among transporters and a lack of travel authorizations for cooperating partners have continued to result in direct distributions by WFP in existing IDP camps since mid-September 2017. WFP is able to carry out distributions with logistics support from the authorities, with WFP paying for trucks and labour provided by the Government. In eight townships of central Rakhine State, WFP assisted 121,000 internally displaced and other most vulnerable populations, including 5,700 pregnant and lactating women and 16,000 children under 5, in January 2018. In areas where there is freedom of movement, WFP also implements school feeding and community asset creation activities to ensure sustainable food security for the assisted populations. Given the ambiguities surrounding ownership of abandoned unharvested crops and land, WFP ceased rice procurement in Rakhine State, which later increased the time needed for food to reach operational areas.
10. **Potential returns.** Nearly 700,000 people have crossed the border into Bangladesh according to the Inter Sector Coordination Group in Bangladesh. Although Myanmar expressed its readiness to commence the repatriation of its nationals on 23 January, with the establishment of two reception centres in Taung Pyo Let Wea and Nga Khu Ya and one transit camp in Hla Poe Kaung to accommodate 30,000 people, the repatriation process has been postponed. WFP stands ready to provide necessary food and nutrition support to food insecure returnees, in partnership with the Government and other actors, once the process begins. Guided by the humanitarian country team’s interim humanitarian response plan for 2018, and subject to the outcomes of needs assessments, WFP plans to assist 270,000 people in 2018 based on principles of engagement developed by the humanitarian country team.

2.2 Kachin State, Shan State and south-eastern Myanmar

11. ***Kachin State.*** Since December 2017 armed conflicts between government forces and the Kachin Independence Army have taken place in Sumprabum and Tanai Townships. More than 900 people have fled the fighting in Sumprabum, sheltering in areas beyond government control. Humanitarian actors have sufficient food for three weeks to provide if and when they are able to gain access to the area. Due to intensified fighting in Tanai, 5,000 people have been unable to leave the area. Humanitarian access to Tanai has been severely restricted since June 2017. Local organizations have been providing cash to enable displaced people to purchase food and other necessities. The United Nations, including WFP, has not had access to areas of Kachin beyond government control since June 2016, despite repeated requests to the authorities from the highest levels of the United Nations.
12. In WFP's regular relief operations, food assistance did not reach 20,000 IDPs in several remote areas of Kachin State in January 2018 due to difficulties with obtaining transport permits from the local authorities. In other affected areas with access to markets, cash transfers were deployed instead.
13. ***Shan State.*** In February 2018, renewed armed conflict between government forces and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army broke out in Kutkai, Hseni and Namtu Townships, displacing several hundred people. Local authorities are leading the emergency response, including the provision of food rations sufficient for one month. WFP has received no request for food assistance to date but will continue to monitor the situation, and is ready to fill any identified gaps. WFP has been unable reach beneficiaries in the Kokang Self-Administered Zone due to pending approval of transport permits.
14. ***South-eastern Myanmar.*** Since the repatriation in October 2016 of an initial group of 71 refugees from Thailand to south-eastern Myanmar, who received WFP's cash resettlement grants, the local authorities have not allowed WFP to conduct monitoring visits to the locations to which the refugees returned. The major challenges of the returnees currently relate to lack of livelihood opportunities. While the timing and number of any new returns remain uncertain, WFP is finalizing a new operational agreement with the International Organization for Migration to provide for cash grants to potential returnees.

3. Resilience building

3.1 National capacity strengthening

15. Among several recent successful workshops, WFP facilitated a national level simulation exercise for government staff. WFP allocated financial resources for improving national storage, warehousing and handling capacity, and is planning to provide additional support to the Government in the form of warehouse equipment. To improve the operational capacity and security of its activities in Rakhine State, WFP plans to relocate from its current rented facilities in Sittwe to a new hub, also in Sittwe. The new hub is expected to support future emergency responses in Rakhine State and will be handed over to the Government once WFP operations are phased out.

3.2 Nutrition, school meals, asset creation and livelihoods

16. WFP continues to contribute to the enhancement of optimal nutrition in Myanmar by supporting the management of acute malnutrition and the prevention of stunting in states and regions with relatively high prevalence of malnutrition. At the request of the Ministry of Health and Sports, the World Bank and the United Nations Network for Scaling up Nutrition (SUN), which is chaired by WFP, jointly provided technical support for the development of a costed multisectoral national plan of action on nutrition for the period 2018–2022.

17. WFP plans to expand its school meals activity, increasing the number of schoolgirls and schoolboys from the current 365,000 to 430,000 in the 2018–2019 academic year. WFP will also scale up its piloted cooked school meals initiative, gradually moving away from nutritious biscuit snacks. Community involvement is a major component of the project, from food procurement, the distribution and preparation of meals with local ingredients to the promotion of health and hygiene practices and nutrition education by women and men caregivers. A community asset creation and livelihood activity will be integrated into the schools meals programme with the aim of planting school gardens to promote rural development and nutrition education.

4. Cross-cutting issues

4.1 Cash programming

18. WFP plans to ramp up cash programming, incorporating it into its relief, nutrition, school meals and asset creation activities, building on the lessons learned from cash-based transfers already used in pilot relief and early recovery operations. A shift to electronic money transfers will initially cover IDPs in all camps in Kachin State and Shan State. In parallel with the rollout of SCOPE, WFP's electronic beneficiary management platform, WFP will introduce a cash-based transfer programme under crisis response in Sittwe, Kyauktaw, Minbya and Mrauk-U townships in central Rakhine State.

4.2 Gender and protection

19. During the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence in November and December 2017, WFP supported the National Myanmar Gender Equality Network's campaign, "From peace in the home to peace in the world: Involve men to fight violence against women". A brief video, featuring statements by displaced women and men in the IDP camp in Myitkyina in Kachin State on the importance of understanding the root causes of intimate partner violence, which could be sparked by changing in-kind assistance to cash-based transfers, was produced. WFP plans to cooperate with UN-Women to develop a gender profile of humanitarian action in Myanmar.
20. WFP engaged the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation to facilitate a technical and policy workshop on humanitarian negotiations, access and decreased humanitarian space. Inability to conduct independent needs assessments, a lack of neutral sources of information, difficulties in navigating dispersed chains of command and lack of trust in humanitarian actors were identified as the major challenges complicating humanitarian engagement in the country.
21. WFP also reaffirmed its commitment to developing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy, which will become a pioneering product in the Asia-Pacific region, allowing WFP to fully incorporate gender, protection and accountability to affected populations in monitoring tools.