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## **REPORT ON THE FIELD VISIT TO BURKINA FASO OF THE WFP EXECUTIVE BOARD**

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The Secretariat invites members of the Board who may have questions of a technical nature with regard to this document to contact the WFP staff focal point indicated below, preferably well in advance of the Board's meeting.

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Should you have any questions regarding matters of dispatch of documentation for the Executive Board, please contact Ms C. Panlilio, Administrative Assistant, Conference Servicing Unit (tel.: 066513-2645).



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. The Executive Board team would like to thank the WFP country team, led by Country Director Anna Lisa Conte, for the very warm reception in Burkina Faso. Much effort and thought went into preparations for our visit, and the country office attended to our every need. We very much appreciated the country team's expertise and passion for its work, not to mention its kind hospitality. We also extend our sincere gratitude to the Assistant Secretary to the Executive Board, Evelyne Togbe, and the WFP staff in Burkina Faso for organizing the Board visit.
2. We give special thanks to President Compaoré for meeting with representatives of the Board. Our appreciation is also extended to the Ministers of Agriculture, Education, and Social Affairs and National Solidarity who met with us, along with senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation. It was very evident that the Government of Burkina Faso has a strong political commitment to eliminating hunger and achieving food security, and that it values the work being done by WFP. The members of the Board benefited greatly from open and constructive discussion with government officials on WFP's activities in the country. The project partners and beneficiaries who met with us and shared their experiences made this visit memorable for us all.

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## INTRODUCTION

3. Executive Board members representing Canada, Kuwait, the Russian Federation, the Sudan and the European Commission visited Burkina Faso from 23 to 29 March 2009. They were accompanied by the Assistant Secretary to the Executive Board. The team spent three days in the capital of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, and one and a half days visiting projects in Ouahigouya in the north. The mission programme included meetings with representatives from the Government of Burkina Faso, including the President and ministers from key departments, WFP project partners, the United Nations country team and project beneficiaries. The team visited a wide range of projects, including the Purchase for Progress (P4P) pilot, the urban voucher project, nutrition projects, a food-for-work (FFW) project and adult literacy projects.
4. The purpose of the visit to Burkina Faso was to:
  - i) consider the alignment of WFP's activities in the country with national plans and programmes, and the degree of cooperation with local partners;
  - ii) observe the coordination on food security and hunger issues among national ministries, and the Government's response to high food prices and financial crisis;
  - iii) observe country-level coordination among WFP and other United Nations organizations, particularly the Rome-based agencies;
  - iv) observe the impact of financial and economic crisis on the food security situation in the country;
  - v) observe the effectiveness of WFP's operations in the country;
  - vi) gain an understanding of logistics and transportation at the country level; and
  - vii) provide input to the evaluation of the country programme and its coherence with the current emergency operation (EMOP) launched in response to economic downturn and soaring food prices.



5. Burkina Faso was selected for the visit for several reasons, not least of which was the food crisis that the country is experiencing. A least-developed country, Burkina Faso is currently experiencing high food prices, which when combined with the economic crisis is threatening its poverty reduction efforts. Rates of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies are high, and the country has one of the lowest education and literacy rates in the world. At the same time, WFP's programme in Burkina Faso is innovative. In addition to school feeding and FFW projects, Burkina Faso is a pilot country for the P4P initiative and is home to WFP's first voucher programme in Africa. Owing to Burkina Faso's high degree of political stability and lack of conflict and natural disasters, the international community often overlooks the problems it faces, which result from a lack of affordable, nutritious food.

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## CONTEXT

6. Burkina Faso is among the poorest and most vulnerable countries in the world, and faces chronic food insecurity and malnutrition. More than 45 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. The 2007/2008 Human Development Report<sup>1</sup> ranks it 176<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries for the following reasons:
- i) The prevalence of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies in Burkina Faso has worsened.
  - ii) Ninety percent of children under 5 years are affected by anaemia.
  - iii) Acute undernutrition (wasting) has increased from 13 to 18.6 percent.
  - iv) The prevalence of stunting and underweight has increased from 30 to 39 percent.
  - v) The crude mortality rate among children under 2 years is 1.27/1000/day.
  - vi) Maternal health has deteriorated, leading to an increase of underweight women from 15 to 21 percent
  - vii) Thirteen percent of pregnant women suffer from anaemia, leading to high levels of low birthweight.
  - viii) Almost two out of ten children die before the age of 5 years.
7. Burkina Faso faces many challenges in its efforts to eradicate poverty and achieve food security, including:
- i) lack of financial resources;
  - ii) limited access to domestic, regional and international markets;
  - iii) vulnerability to recurring droughts;
  - iv) limited access to food and water, improved seeds, organic fertilizers and agricultural equipment;
  - v) a social protection system that is in the early stages of development;
  - vi) logistical challenges as a landlocked country, leading to high prices and transportation difficulties;

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2007. *Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting climate change: Human solidarity in a divided world*. New York.



- vii) decreasing revenues from the export food and agricultural commodities produced by small farmers; and
- viii) rapid population growth of 3.2 percent a year.

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## FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

8. WFP's operations in Burkina Faso are well prioritized, focusing on the most vulnerable people. The emphasis on school feeding and adult literacy is consistent with the low levels of education and literacy in the country. Although WFP operations are underfunded, they are well implemented and are achieving results. Project partners and beneficiaries seemed to be very committed to the projects, and were in large part very satisfied with them.
9. On a number of occasions, the team noted the very good relationships between WFP and the Government of Burkina Faso, partners and beneficiaries. The Government clearly values WFP's role and was satisfied with its work in the country. Partners from other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector have had positive experiences working with WFP.
10. The team saw the impact of the food and fuel price crisis in Burkina Faso, and it was clear that the crisis is still a significant factor in the country. The extreme level of poverty and the high rate of hunger and malnutrition among vulnerable people – women and children – were very evident. It is unfortunate that with no conflicts or natural disasters, the international community is not aware of the emergency situation in Burkina Faso.
11. Burkina Faso is not a pilot in the One UN programme, and the team noted that the United Nations principle of Delivering as One is still far from a reality. During its meeting with United Nations agencies, the team asked about WFP's engagement in the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and about United Nations coordination on the ground more generally. The participants did not see clearly how WFP fits into UNDAF, as many of them still perceive WFP as only an emergency operation and not as a partner in the transition to development, in some cases. Some United Nations agencies rightly noted that WFP's different budgetary and funding modalities often prevent it from doing joint programming with other United Nations agencies.
12. The team noted that there is some degree of cooperation among the three Rome-based agencies in Burkina Faso, although there is room for improvement. The team met with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and visited a project that FAO is implementing with WFP; it was evident that there is a good degree of coordination, project planning and implementation and information sharing between the two agencies. The team felt that WFP deserved much of the credit for this coordination. It was felt that the lack of FAO and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) staff in Burkina Faso make it harder for the three agencies to work together more closely.
13. The team was impressed with the nutrition projects visited. These are targeted to the most vulnerable populations in the country, including children, pregnant women, lactating mothers and women with HIV/AIDS. Delivery of the nutrition projects is well organized; food distribution is linked to health interventions such as vaccinations and distributing mosquito nets, broadening the overall positive impact of the projects. The team was concerned that the individual ration of food distributed to HIV-infected mothers seemed insufficient. Some of the mothers we spoke to said that they always distribute their rations to the rest of the family.



14. There was a perception that some project activities, such as distribution of food to HIV-infected mothers and FFW, are specifically WFP initiatives isolated from any national mechanism or policy. The degree of ownership by national or local authorities was not always sufficiently clear. It is important that the Government of Burkina Faso always be in the driving seat.
15. The voucher programme, which is being undertaken in urban and semi-urban areas around Ouagadougou, is the first to be piloted in Africa. The team visited both the voucher distribution centre and some of the local stores where vouchers can be traded for food supplies. The team observed that the programme had been established quickly, in response to the food crisis, and that it appears to be well planned and running efficiently. To its credit, WFP had conducted a number of preliminary surveys and assessments to determine the viability of using a voucher programme, and has been careful to minimize the potential for fraud or the misuse of vouchers. The Government's Ministry of Social Affairs is actively engaged in the project, with the Minister conducting her own monitoring missions to ensure it is working effectively. Beneficiaries understood how the programme works and were satisfied with how it is being implemented. A number of beneficiaries noted that the programme could be improved by providing flexibility to purchase different commodities such as rice. Some also noted a desire for increased rations. Locating the voucher distribution at a health centre allows vaccinations to be carried out and other health services to be obtained, which expands the benefits of the voucher programme. The team noted that the hand-over strategy for the voucher programme – which involves having the Government take over the programme and making it part of a social safety net – is somewhat unclear and overly optimistic in its expectations. Based on what the team saw on the ground, the Ministry of Social Affairs is not yet in a position to take over the project, and the safety net programme, which the World Bank is leading, is still a long way off.
16. The P4P project in Burkina Faso has great potential to increase local purchases of food, thereby providing much-needed resources to local agricultural producers. The team met with the farmers' associations that had just fulfilled their first contracts to supply food to WFP. The farmers appreciate WFP's efforts to purchase their products and are satisfied with the implementation of the project so far. They are very proud to be helping those in need in their own country, and see the project as being beneficial for the entire community and not just themselves. As the P4P project matures, WFP should be able to make linkages with the voucher programme and school feeding programmes. This will require contributions to WFP operations in Burkina Faso, to provide the resources to purchase food from the P4P project. Farmers' limited access to credit, lack of seeds, machinery and equipment, and inadequate food storage and stock management may be limiting factors.
17. The team observed that in several cases the unpredictability or lack of funds was limiting WFP's ability to respond to needs in Burkina Faso. Team members are concerned that gaps in funding may jeopardize the expected results of some operations.
18. Logistical challenges are much greater in Burkina Faso than expected. WFP has more than 2,000 distribution sites in the country, and ships most food in small quantities, making the cost of delivering food higher than expected.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 19. The Government should:

- i) put in place targeted food and nutrition support measures and social safety nets, giving priority to maternal, infant and child programme;
- ii) reinforce the capacity of local authorities, NGOs, the private sector and farmers' associations and involve them directly in the national dialogue on food security issues, to create collective responsibility among all actors in food and agriculture;
- iii) elaborate an effective resource mobilization strategy to attract the donor community's attention, including through WFP, and increase investments in measures against chronic hunger and malnutrition and for agricultural development, given that agriculture accounts for 36 percent of gross domestic product;
- iv) make food security and ending hunger a top priority, and take into account the interlinkages between food and agriculture and other policies, such as financial, trade, monetary, health, education, social and labour policies;
- v) have the Ministry of Agriculture involve WFP in its pre-harvest plan; and
- vi) work with WFP to ensure that hand-over strategies to national authorities are well integrated into the design of any WFP intervention, such as the voucher programme.

### 20. WFP should:

- i) continue to give priority to the poorest and most vulnerable population groups – malnourished children, pregnant women, lactating mothers and HIV-infected people. In this context, it is essential to strengthen the needs assessment component. WFP should also focus its activities on areas where it clearly adds value, such as in food distribution and increased access to food.
- ii) link country activities to WFP's Strategic Plan and the Strategic Results Framework. In this regard, results-based management approaches need to be developed further, with a focus on expected outcomes.
- iii) for P4P, continue providing training courses for local farmers on food quality and standards, etc., and encourage farmers' associations to allocate part of the income received from P4P to increasing productivity, through new machinery, equipment, seeds, etc.
- iv) reinforce partnerships with FAO, IFAD, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other United Nations agencies to facilitate the transition from emergency humanitarian aid to development assistance. Appropriate and well-defined hand-over strategies can be useful in this regard.
- v) for the voucher programme, consider a gradual transition from unconditional to conditional vouchers, for example, vouchers for work or health, such as regular medical check-ups or vaccinations. Unconditional vouchers should be considered a temporary measure only. If the voucher programme is extended beyond the present EMOP, the hand-over strategy should be revised to be more realistic in view of the challenges of handing over such a project in the short term.

### 21. The Executive Board should:

- i) try to secure more predictable and sustainable funding for WFP operations in Burkina Faso, to ensure the sustainability of actions;



- ii) give high priority to capacity-building for all actors in all interventions; and
- iii) consider the current situation in the country an emergency situation.

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## MISSION ORGANIZATION

- 22. Board visits are a useful way of learning how WFP operates on the ground and of seeing in action many of things discussed at Board meetings. To help make such field visits as beneficial as possible, the team would like to offer a few lessons learned from its visit to Burkina Faso.
- 23. First, the team was unable to visit a school feeding project, which is WFP's main programme in Burkina Faso, because schools were on holiday at the time of the mission. This was particularly regrettable in light of the forthcoming Board discussion of a new school feeding policy later this year. It would be helpful for future Board visits to be timed so that the team can visit WFP's main projects and programmes in the country, not just the new and innovative ones.
- 24. Second, the team would have benefited from a more structured approach to some of the project visits. Board members were given an overview of WFP's overall operation in Burkina Faso, but it would also have been useful to have a short briefing on each project visited before the visit, outlining the project's objectives and expected results, WFP's role in the project, project partners and their roles, beneficiaries, etc. Without this, it was sometimes difficult for Board members to understand what they were seeing and to have meaningful discussions with project partners and beneficiaries.
- 25. Third, translation/interpretation was sometimes inconsistent, making it difficult for everyone to gain the same level of understanding of what was being visited. Professional interpretation was not necessarily required, but translation could have been more consistent and systematic. The language barrier was often an obstacle to interactive exchanges with national authorities and beneficiaries.
- 26. Finally, as most WFP operations need to involve local authorities to a certain degree to ensure efficient implementation, it would have been interesting to meet some local authorities to discuss the role of WFP and to hear their perception of the different WFP initiatives.

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## CONCLUSIONS

- 27. The team is very appreciative of the efforts of WFP, in both Rome and Burkina Faso, to organize a very interesting and diverse mission. The members of the Board left Burkina Faso with a deep understanding of the extent and nature of the food security crisis in the country and the challenges faced in meeting the food and nutrition needs of the population. Board members also learned a great deal about how WFP works on the ground in response to a diverse range of needs in challenging circumstances. Both WFP and the Government of Burkina Faso are to be commended for their commitment to addressing chronic food insecurity and malnutrition in the country and for their willingness to pilot innovative approaches such as P4P and voucher programmes.





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## ACRONYMS USED IN THE DOCUMENT

EMOP	emergency operation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFW	food-for-work
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
NGO	non-governmental organization
P4P	purchase for progress
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund