1. The Regional Director outlined the situation in the region, where almost 1.5 million mt of WFP food had been distributed in 2009. Beneficiary numbers had declined slightly, following satisfactory harvests at the end of the year, but people still required support with building resilience against drought. Threats and security issues had forced WFP to suspend operations in southern Somalia, but it was still reaching about 1 million beneficiaries in other parts of the country, whenever access was possible. High malnutrition rates continued in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) owing to deep poverty, instability in the east and outbreak of conflict in the west; WFP was assisting 3 million people in the country. In Zimbabwe the situation had improved, but 800,000 people still needed assistance.

2. The regional bureau was improving controls to mitigate the impact of risks consolidating risk registers kept by country offices. WFP was working with the Government of Ethiopia to improve food management accountability and reporting and beneficiary targeting. Response analyses were being carried out in several countries including Rwanda, where an agreement to improve targeting criteria had been reached. Forward purchasing of 330,000 mt had resulted in food reaching beneficiaries in Kenya and Uganda within ten days, instead of the usual two months. Cash and voucher pilots were targeting more than 500,000 beneficiaries, and WFP was supporting governments’ investment planning. Local purchases had totalled 608,000 mt, worth US$23 million, and 35,000 small farmers were involved in P4P initiatives. Millennium Village projects were expanding, notably in Malawi.

3. The Director of OE presented results of the Kenya school feeding impact evaluation, the office’s first impact evaluation. Its mixed qualitative and quantitative approach would be applied to future school feeding impact assessments in other countries. Results and lessons had been shared with a wide range of WFP staff and discussed at a workshop for the team leaders of the next round of school feeding impact evaluations.

4. The evaluation had found that school feeding improved enrolment rates, gender parity and students’ continuation into secondary school. The meals reduced hunger and contributed most – on some occasions all – of the children’s daily food intake. As a resource transfer, school feeding represented between 4 and 9 percent of households’ income. In identifying the causes of these impacts, so as to repeat successes and address weaknesses, the evaluation found that the specific foods distributed and the presence of the Essential Package were fundamental factors in success. Performance was also affected by the availability of fuel-efficient cooking facilities; the quality of education within the school; parents’ recognition of the value of education for their children’s future; and community support. School feeding encouraged school attendance most among younger children, when the value of the food was higher than that of having the child at home or work. Girls dropped out more than boys in later years, especially in areas where girls married young.

5. A representative of Colombia gave a presentation on the Board visit to Kenya from 20 February to 6 March 2010. The visit had covered WFP operations in diverse settings, including urban areas, arid and semi-arid lands, and refugee camps. The Board members
had been impressed by the government commitment and support to WFP activities, which were in turn aligned with government and partners’ programmes and priorities, and effective in meeting beneficiaries’ needs. WFP had a long-established presence in Kenya; interventions in some refugee camps were serving their third generation of beneficiaries, and the school feeding programme was WFP’s longest-running.

6. In response, the Board commended WFP’s work in the region, and emphasized the need to continue supporting countries’ efforts to address enormous problems, especially in obtaining sufficient food. Board members’ recommendations to the Secretariat included focusing on the gradual hand-over of school feeding to the Government and communities; addressing protection and health issues; strengthening WFP’s alliance with the World Bank; piloting cash and voucher distributions; and continuing with P4P, including carrying out a mid-term evaluation to assess its efficacy.

7. Members welcomed the impact evaluation and appreciated the management responses to its recommendations. They noted that comments made at previous Board meetings had been incorporated into the evaluation methodology, and agreed with management that increasing advocacy work was the best response to recommendations that were outside WFP’s mandate. Many members regretted the lack of a strong hand-over strategy and urged the Secretariat to help the Kenyan Government develop its food management and commodity procurement capacities; this would facilitate hand-over and encourage more cost-effective procurement than the current system in which each government-supported school procured its own food. WFP should operate school feeding programmes in only the poorest areas, while supporting government-run programmes elsewhere, including through comparisons of the cost-effectiveness of using home-grown versus imported foods. Some members noted a risk of creating dependency in pastoral and arid areas, where WFP had been distributing food for many years. Members also noted the need to develop baseline data at the onset of programmes, to allow the measurement of results.

8. While members were unanimous in recognizing school feeding as a valuable development tool for use in many different social contexts, some questioned its role in humanitarian assistance. School feeding excluded the most vulnerable children whose families could not send them to school, and often provided food to all the children in a school, regardless of their need. These members encouraged OE to identify the different impacts of school feeding in emergency and development settings, and to compare school feeding’s cost-effectiveness with those of other interventions.

9. Regarding girls’ drop-out from school at puberty, members suggested that more awareness-raising about the value of education be carried out in the communities where this occurred. They also recommended doing more to improve school environments and community support, and to address the other factors that reduced the positive impact of school feeding, such as lack of water and cooking facilities. WFP should work with the Government, NGOs and other partners to address shortcomings in the education system and infrastructure, and issues such as health and community support, to create an enabling environment.

10. The Director of OE confirmed that findings of this and other evaluations would be used to guide the design of school feeding policies and strategies. The evaluation had sought to find out why people did not send their children to school. While recognizing the difficulty in measuring the effect of school feeding on school attendance, it was clear that schools with feeding tended to have higher enrolment and attendance rates than those without. Comparisons with other interventions, such as cash and voucher distributions, could eventually be included in country portfolio evaluations.
11. The country director in Kenya reminded the Board that several groups of humanitarian actors had been formed to examine and promote education issues, such as the Essential Package, in Kenya. The Government was committed to taking over school feeding programmes, but sustainable funding was still a challenge. Home-grown school feeding was still in its early stages; its targeting and comparative cost-effectiveness were being established. WFP’s selection criteria for school feeding schools included availability of food preparation facilities; a minimum of 100 students; and Ministry of Education approval of teachers’ qualifications and teaching curricula. The country office was implementing some of the recommendations made during the Board visit, including beginning to develop a new country strategy. A series of assessments were expected in the near future, including the mid-term review of the CP, and these would help identify the way forward for the country office.

12. With regard to the draft CP for Burundi, Board members approved the fact that it built on the preceding PRRO and was in line with the new CP model, but felt that gender issues should be addressed more specifically. Board members were also pleased to see that agricultural and environmental skills training, health capacity training and food fortification were being carried out in partnership with FAO and IFAD with the support of the Government, which was also supporting school feeding. Some Board members wondered, however, whether the inclusion of very young children in school feeding was an appropriate approach and suggested that the resources could be used more effectively to support food-insecure families.

13. The Board cautioned that WFP’s involvement in humanitarian operations should be limited to clear food-related interventions such as cash and voucher projects. It was suggested that health interventions, for example, be handled by WHO and UNICEF; to avoid duplication and overlaps. The proposed CP was felt to be timely and relevant in helping to address long-term issues such as land ownership and insecurity, and some Board members asked for clarification of WFP’s plans for handing over to the Government.

14. In response, the Secretariat noted the Board’s concerns regarding partnerships and gave assurances that WFP was working effectively with partners in line with the provisions of the country strategy document; complementarity and alignment with national priorities were sought in all cases. The Secretariat pointed out that WFP’s VAM system enabled it to procure food in surplus areas and allocate it to food-insecure districts as part of the food assistance approach and in support of projects implemented by other United Nations agencies. WFP was working with UNICEF on young child development, and would review its school feeding policies in line with the Board’s recommendations. Capacity development was ongoing in ministries and government departments with a view to eventual hand-over of WFP activities.