

# THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME'S RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE OF LINKING RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT

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Emergencies require immediate action. Food security must be a priority. But beyond the urgent demands of the moment, we must look to the longer term. Food for humanitarian assistance must over time become food for development. And this must be followed by self-sustaining food production in time of peace. Understanding this continuum and making it work is one of the most challenging physical and intellectual projects of our time. You who are working on food for development are peacemakers for the future.

Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali  
United Nations Secretary General  
Statement to WFP staff, April 1993

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the recent past, 40-50 million poor and hungry people have been assisted by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) every year with over three million tons of food aid valued at US\$1.5 billion.

From the inception of WFP operations in 1963, food for development accounted for the major share of the Programme's aid. Since the late 1980s, however, relief food for the victims of natural disasters, refugees and displaced people has grown steadily and now accounts for some two thirds of WFP's assistance. This shift, the increasing frequency and duration of emergencies in some developing countries and the declining trend of resources for development, has, *inter alia*, led WFP to develop policies and operations that facilitate the linking of relief and development assistance (LRD), particularly in Africa.

Traditionally, external assistance, including that to areas prone to disasters, has been dichotomized between relief and development. Relief aid has concentrated on the alleviation of emergency situations, and has been implemented with a short time horizon, in a top-down manner, based on relatively little analysis of the cause(s) of disaster. Development has focused on longer-term activities, with more emphasis on participatory planning, and based on problem analysis and feasibility studies. Bureaucratic, professional, logistical and intellectual requirements have resulted in different mindsets that have created an artificial divide between relief and development, which in the reality of the poorest developing countries does not exist.

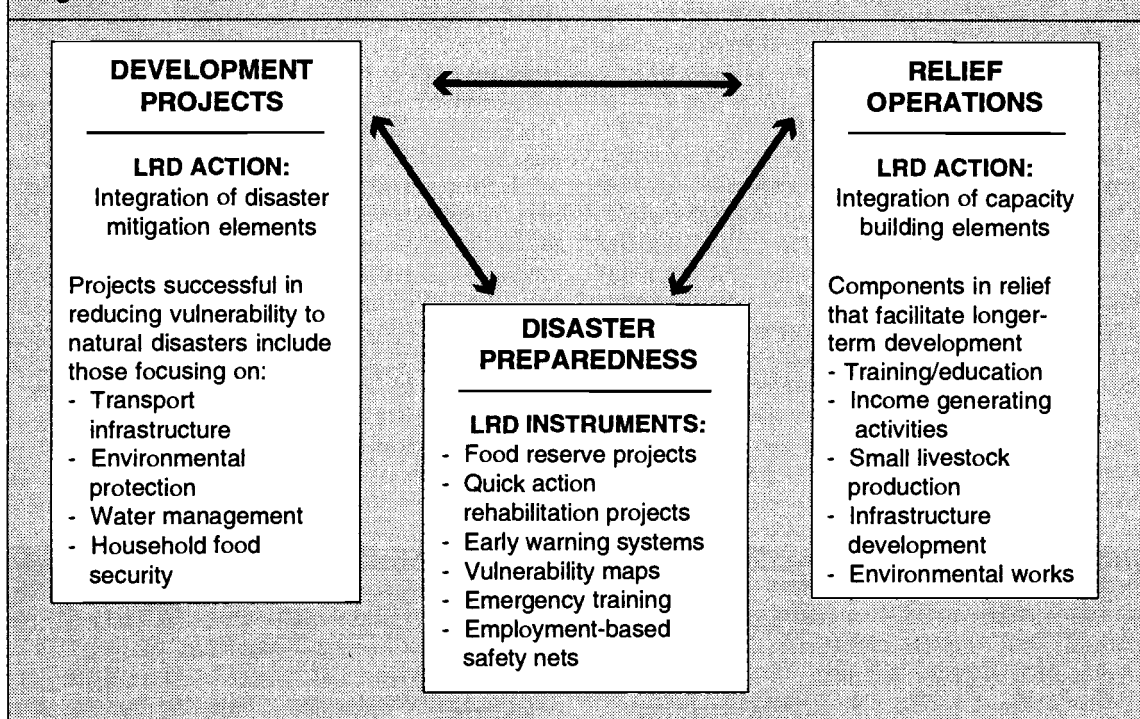
In the context of pressing problems, such as in sub-Saharan Africa with its increasingly protracted emergency conditions, the separation of relief and development assistance has become part of the problem rather than the solution. The issue has therefore arisen: how can relief assistance be provided in ways so as to support, rather than undermine, development efforts and, conversely, how can development aid, at the national and community levels, incorporate disaster mitigation features to mitigate possible future crises?

The approach WFP has developed to this question is based on three pillars: integration of disaster mitigation elements in development projects; integration of capacity building elements in relief operations; and strengthening disaster preparedness through a variety of measures (see Figure 1, next page).

In 1992, the governing body of WFP, the Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes (CFA), endorsed the systematic application of WFP assistance to support disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and rehabilitation measures, especially in Africa (WFP 1992).

In 1989, the CFA endorsed the establishment of a special facility for protracted refugee and displaced person operations with a view, *inter alia*, to ensure that an element of 'durable solution' was not neglected and that the assistance provided took into account all possible development and/or rehabilitation aspects. With this facility, WFP food supplies can be used with more flexibility and in ways better suited to the needs of the moment, including free distribution, organized feeding programmes,

**Figure 1: WFP'S APPROACH TO LINKING RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT**



food-for-work activities and measures to mitigate the adverse impact of refugee and displaced persons on the economic and social life of 'host' populations. The establishment of the special facility became necessary since neither development nor emergency resource windows were ever conceived as instruments to deal with the reality of large-scale protracted refugee and displaced person situations (WFP 1989).

## 2 DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Focusing WFP's development resources on labour-intensive works programmes in the framework of national disaster mitigation and rehabilitation strategies is one of the Programme's main approaches for LRD. Food-for-work based activities are designed to provide simultaneously:

a immediate employment and income, thereby alleviating hunger and poverty and strengthening self-help capacity, and

b construction and improvement of infrastructure needed, particularly to increase agricultural

production, stimulate rural development and strengthen protective measures against drought and other disasters.

WFP-assisted vulnerable group feeding projects that provide targeted food, income and health assistance, can complement labour-intensive works programmes and strengthen safety nets, particularly for children and those not able to work. Even WFP-assisted school feeding projects have the potential to enhance food security as, at times of disasters, additional beneficiaries, including under five-year olds, can benefit from the institutional mechanism already in place.

Several development activities have proved particularly successful in Africa and elsewhere, and may be replicated more widely. These include projects that are directly strengthening disaster mitigation and rehabilitation, such as improvements of the transport infrastructure (construction and rehabilitation of rural roads) and/or projects with in-built disaster-mitigation features that stabilize or increase agricultural production, such as in the fields of environmental protection (soil conservation, reforestation, anti-desertification measures), water

management (irrigation infrastructure and water harvesting measures), as well as interventions that improve household food security (agricultural improvements, vulnerable group feeding, market restructuring/price policies).

### **3 RELIEF OPERATIONS**

To the extent possible and as appropriate, WFP emergency interventions are being adapted to incorporate longer-term development instead of possibly undermining them (for example, by creating a dependency syndrome). Particularly in protracted refugee/displaced person operations, a deliberate effort is being made to add components such as training, income-generating activities, small-scale livestock and crop production, environmental protection measures and development of basic community infrastructure. A crucial pre-condition for the feasibility of these components is the collaboration with partners such as NGOs, UNHCR and the host country government in funding and implementation.

In relief operations for returnees and demobilized soldiers, WFP food assistance combines relief and development by tiding recipients over the period of resettlement and, simultaneously, engaging them in rehabilitation and reconstruction works. In countries where civil strife is prolonged and food shortages are acute, but purchasing power exists, distribution of free emergency food aid may be (partly) replaced by selling it through the market. This approach can help meet food needs, restrain inflation, encourage the revitalization of market institutions and generate local currency funds that can be used for humanitarian or reconstruction purposes.

### **4 DISASTER PREPAREDNESS**

Linking relief and development with a view to reducing the frequency, intensity and impact of disasters, and to identify relief programmes designed to be consistent with, and reinforce, development, needs to be complemented with measures that prepare for the mitigation of disasters. These involve the establishment of facilities that lessen the severity of food insecurity, measures for detecting populations that are vulnerable to disasters and the preparation of contingency plans. Since 1992, special funds have been available for strengthening WFP-supported activities in disaster mitigation. These funds have been committed for variety of studies, training pro-

grammes and pilot projects, to enhance WFP's understanding and application of linkages between relief, development and disaster mitigation.

Food reserves at national and village level are assisted by WFP with a view to tide people over recurring periods of drought or to ensure that an immediate supply of food is available during emergencies while food aid imports are being arranged. Quick-action rehabilitation projects help to tide people over the period of reconstruction and prevent them from having to migrate in search of food, keeping the household unit intact.

The capacity to detect emerging food insecurity situations at an early stage and to respond in a timely fashion can reduce the costs of dealing with a full-blown emergency. WFP's main instruments for the early detection of evolving emergencies and the monitoring of their evolution include: linking up with global and national early warning systems, participating in country specific crop forecast and food needs assessment missions (in collaboration with FAO); and promoting the preparation of vulnerability maps that identify the areas and sectors of the population most vulnerable to food insecurity (currently in collaboration with the British NGO Save the Children/UK and FAO).

Timely response to emergencies is based on contingency arrangements. These can take the form of special emergency management training programmes or the establishment of rapid response teams. However, contingency plans may also go much further. Where appropriate, WFP-assisted development projects may include reserve components set aside for (relief) work programmes to be implemented during periods of emergencies. In some pilot projects, WFP assists 'employment-based safety net' schemes that are specifically designed to create developmental assets and, simultaneously, to expand and contract their work programmes in a flexible manner, responding to the increased need for employment in times of emergencies.

### **5 CONSTRAINTS AND ISSUES IN LINKING RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT**

The scope for LRD depends on the type of disaster. There are significant differences in emergencies caused by man (war, civil conflict), cataclysmic natural events that occur with little warning (earth-

quakes, floods), and slowly maturing natural disasters (crop losses caused by drought, pest and disease attacks) (Frankenberger and Shaw 1993).

In man-made disasters, prevention and preparedness measures are most difficult and complex, and rehabilitation leading to development often more protracted. This type of disaster, with the least scope for mitigation in the framework of LRD, unfortunately is the one which historically has grown most rapidly and now accounts for more than 80 per cent of the emergencies assisted by WFP.

Significantly more experience with LRD exists in the case of cataclysmic disasters, where WFP's focus is on improving prediction, preparedness but also prevention (e.g. in form of dykes and dams constructed through food-for-work programmes). If disasters are drought-induced, LRD is based on detection of vulnerable people and areas, setting up food reserves, short-term livelihood protection through food transfers, and long-term livelihood promotion through disaster prevention measures, such as labour-intensive development of transport infrastructure, environmental protection, etc. The most advanced form of LRD in countries prone to natural disasters are employment-based safety net programmes, which WFP has begun to support on a pilot basis.

Problems encountered by WFP in implementing LRD include: uncertain cost-effectiveness, limitations in coverage of vulnerable groups, lack of opportunity for introducing development components, high costs, insufficient resources, institutional barriers, and scepticism of the concept of LRD.

In WFP's effort to better link relief and development, a fundamental question has been raised whether in many situations it would not be more cost-efficient to clearly distinguish between the two tasks. It is obvious that LRD saves costs where resources, otherwise required for relief, become productive for development. However, there are also indications that the contingency element and possibly the lower productivity of LRD includes additional costs, when compared to the conventional sequence of relief, rehabilitation and development. An evaluation of the economics of LRD has not yet been undertaken.

Assuming that LRD is economically worthwhile and that it is feasible to redesign WFP-assisted development projects as well as refocus on the

most vulnerable people, the question remains whether the size of LRD programmes will be sufficient to provide a safety net for those requiring relief in times of disaster. WFP's experience to date suggests that while impressive results can be achieved in countries where institutional capacities and contingency plans exist, there may still remain a great number of people who can only be reached with direct relief handouts. During the southern Africa drought of 1992/93, for example, a WFP-assisted food-for-work project in Lesotho met relief requirements by tripling the volume of work offered; however, it still covered not more than some 15 per cent of the population eligible for relief food. For smaller, more localized, food shortages, this approach obviously has far greater impact and may prevent the need for free relief handouts.

Limitations in LRD are even more pronounced in the case of protracted refugee and displaced people operations. Introducing developmental activities, such as promotion of income-generating activities, environmental works and crop production, is most of the time possible only on a modest scale and in a minority of cases. Of the 24 WFP-assisted protracted relief operations approved in 1993, only seven had a sizeable share of food resources set aside for development. However, almost all operations had some degree of basic human resource development included, such as nutrition and health measures, and to some extent education.

Investments in disaster preparedness measures are mainly constrained by high costs and benefits that are not always certain. Food reserves are usually expensive to manage and insufficient in size. Early warning systems, food needs assessments and vulnerability mapping may detect food insecurity but the response is all too often not adequate or in time. Quick-action rehabilitation projects are rarely used for any other than cataclysmic disasters and work best where recipient countries can meet the considerable demands for non-food resources and implementation capacity.

A major sticking point for doing more on LRD is the lack of sufficient resources and related institutional barriers to switch between relief and development. This applies not only to bilateral aid but also to WFP as a multilateral institution.

- Much of WFP's regular resources are tied up in development projects that often have little direct

impact on disaster mitigation. The process of redesigning and refocusing these projects has only just begun.

- Over four-fifths of WFP's emergency resources are tied and designated by donors and provided on an *ad-hoc* basis. Programming for activities that link relief and development is therefore difficult.
- Funding for protracted refugee/displaced person operations is usually barely sufficient to cover the basic food needs of the people in need. Additional and complementary resources for developmental components are very scarce.

In addition to these constraints of resourcing and funding, scepticism, and the lack of outright success stories, make LRD an effort that is only slowly moving from an experimental phase into the mainstream. This is despite WFP being considered by some as the organization par excellence to develop and pursue practical approaches in LRD.

## 6 OUTLOOK

Nevertheless, there are prospects for continued and increasing efforts in taking on the challenge of LRD. Three developments provide some optimism that WFP (as the organization within the United Nations system that most directly addresses both the relief and development needs of poor and hungry people throughout the world) may be in the forefront of identifying more practical approaches to LRD.

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## REFERENCES

- Frankenberger, T. and Shaw, J., 1993, 'Disaster mitigation in the emergency-development continuum', *Arid Lands Newsletter*, Volume 34, Tucson: University of Arizona
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These are: better cooperation among agencies, increased knowledge about LRD, and better programming of external assistance.

A number of donors and agencies have established special programmes to offset the deepening effects of famine and food insecurity, particularly in Africa, and to support disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and rehabilitation programmes. Increased collaboration and coordination between them should alleviate resource constraints and extend the coverage of food security safety nets.

Several developing countries have gained experience with LRD concepts. A lively discussion on the subject has started in academic circles and in aid agencies including the United Nations system. Issues, such as lack of studies on the economics of LRD and scepticism based on absence of information, may thus be addressed.

Finally, the problem of institutional barriers will be addressed through the wider introduction of country programme approaches. Instead of focusing on individual relief operations or development projects, the programme approach is based on a problem analysis and a strategy that sees the vulnerability to disasters as part of the development programme to be supported. UN General Assembly Resolution 47/199 strongly supports coordination among agencies and the programme approach based on national action by the developing countries themselves.