

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The operation has been one of the biggest but "most silent" of WFP's complex emergencies, experiencing low media visibility for long periods of its history. Similarly, WFP's response, although significant, has been relatively discreet and low-key. Between 1990 and 1995, total food commodities supplied by WFP to the four war-affected countries amounted to about 695,000 tons at a total cost of some 390 million dollars. Liberia received 38 percent of total deliveries, Guinea 28 percent, Cote d'Ivoire 21 percent and Sierra Leone 13 percent. The United States has been a major contributor throughout the operation, as was the European Union (EU) up to 1993. Several other countries, in particular Japan, Sweden and the Netherlands, have also contributed in food and cash.

## BACKGROUND TO THE EMERGENCY

The recent period of civil strife in Liberia (since December 1989) has wreaked devastating effects on Liberia itself and has had major implications beyond its borders, especially in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire.

In this region, some three million people have been affected; of these, more than two million are internally displaced persons (IDPs) and some 850,000 are refugees, out of pre-war populations of about 2.5 million in Liberia and 4.5 million in Sierra Leone. Other afflicted categories of the population classify neither as refugee nor internally displaced and are therefore often overlooked.

Liberia had experienced intermittent tension prior to 1989. However, the attack on 24 December 1989 in Nimba county by a group of Liberian rebels known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) sparked the beginning of a major civil war that six years later has yet to finish. Over time, factions and sub-factions have entered the conflict, creating great chaos, complicating any peace efforts and continually forcing people to flee their villages and seek refuge in the capital city (under the protection of the Economic Community of West African States cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)) and in the neighbouring countries of Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone in particular. It is thought that some 200,000 lives have been lost.

In Sierra Leone, the dynamics of the emergency are partly related to those in Liberia, but fuelled by forces internal to Sierra Leone. Civil strife commenced in March 1991 when members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUE) launched attacks against government forces. The continuing violence from March 1991 into 1996 and the indiscriminate killing of thousands of civilians have led to large population movements to major towns and the capital city and into the neighbouring countries of Guinea and Liberia. It is estimated that one third of the 4.5 million population have been forced to flee their homes.

## OVERVIEW OF THE WFP RESPONSE

WFP assistance (initiated on 15 February 1990) was first channelled through six country-specific emergency operations (EMOPs). Following the escalation of the Liberian crisis and the increasing complexity of the overall operation, a regional "umbrella" approach was introduced and implemented through three regional EMOPs and five regional protracted refugee and displaced person operations (PRO) - No. 4604 - including the current phase. The regional (End pvii)

operation has also included 4,000 Liberian refugees in Nigeria (assisted by WFP up to the end of 1994) and 14,000 Liberian refugees in Ghana who are still being assisted under the present PRO.

With a view to promoting self-reliance and avoiding dependency, a phase-out strategy has already been in place since 1992 through a gradual reduction of the ration, and since 1994-95 through a modification of the food basket. On the basis of the yearly joint WFP/UNHCR/donor/NGO food needs assessments, this strategy took into account what was seen as the special nature of this regional emergency operation in which the majority of refugees and IDPs are integrated into local communities and engaged in productive and income-generating activities. However, the "safety net" and supplementary feeding schemes for vulnerable groups, i.e., pre-school children, unaccompanied children, expectant and nursing mothers and the elderly, as well as newly-arrived refugees or IDPs with a low nutritional status, (both in addition to general distribution), have been maintained throughout the different phases of the PRO. The 1996 programme has been designed in such a way as to progressively phase out general distribution in favour of targeted feeding schemes, i.e., emergency vulnerable group and school feeding and food-for-work.

The numbers of beneficiaries have fluctuated over the six years in question, both as a result of the intensification of the conflicts, and in relation to the accessibility of affected populations. Exact numbers are difficult to calculate for the fluid populations and even official figures vary between different documents. The following table shows estimated numbers of beneficiaries served by WFP over the period 1990-95.

Year	Liberia		Sierra Leone		Guinea	Cote d'Ivoire	
	Refugees	IDPs**	Refugees	IDPs	Refugees	Refugees	
1990	46,000		125,000		325,000	300,000	
1991	800,000		125,000		325,000	300,000	
1992	800,000		10,000	230,000	450,000	240,000	
1993	100,000	1,000,000	8,000		255,000	485,000	180,000
1994	100,000	1,000,000	6,000		255,000	485,000	180,000
1995	100,000	1,400,000	6,000		294,000	485,000	250,000

\* Liberian IDPs include the 800,000 population of Monrovia, designated "war-affected". Although an estimated 600,000 war-affected people in need of aid were identified by 1991 in Greater Liberia, this area has only been accessible sporadically.

Between 1991 and 1995, the relief operation succeeded in delivering an average of 130,000 tons a year, or nearly 9,000 tons a month. In terms of volume, it was not an extraordinarily large undertaking for the Programme. During the same period, far larger delivery operations were conducted in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Republics of the Former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Southern Africa. However, the operation was particularly complex in terms of delivery, primarily because of continuing civil conflict and deteriorating physical infrastructure.

There has been a fairly constant flow of WFP-supplied food commodities transiting through the four main ports of Freetown, Monrovia, Conakry and San Pedro, although with some important variations in the use of individual ports. WFP has taken responsibility in conjunction with implementing partners, i.e., non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for the whole process, from the port to the extended delivery points (EDPs) up to final delivery points and, for

internally displaced persons, up to distribution. For the refugee population, food distribution, (End pix)

monitoring and reporting are undertaken by UNHCR' implementing NGOs. WFP works indirectly with them, except in Cote d'Ivoire, where WFP' implementing partners assume this responsibility for reasons given in this Report.

## NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

This evaluation was primarily commissioned to carry out a programme policy analysis of the 1990-95 period of WFP' assistance to Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees and IDPs in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone. The mission was entrusted with the task of taking a retrospective look for the purpose of coming up with lessons to be learned "for next time" (as well as for the remainder of the current regional operation "this time"), whether in this region or another. The evaluation is therefore in the form of a thematic overview of issues mentioned in the following paragraph, including matters of policy and institutional design. All policy concerns were examined in an operational context and one mission member looked in particular at the delivery system and the cost-effectiveness of the programme.

The mission was requested by WFP to examine the following issues: a) efficiency and effectiveness in identifying and targeting beneficiaries in the light of overall assistance provided and individual survival strategies; b) effectiveness of coordination between the organizations involved in the relief operation; c) relevance and efficiency of the regional approach; and d) relief-rehabilitation-development linkage. During the course of the mission' work, other issues were included, such as that of general distribution versus targeted feeding schemes.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### Delivery and distribution

With regard to delivery and (to a lesser extent) distribution, the performance of the regional relief operation is generally believed to have been of a very high standard. Huge amounts of food have reached the areas and the people in need under the most difficult physical and security conditions. However, because of shortcomings in commodity tracking and reporting, this record could not be defended unambiguously, when criticized.

In general, delivery was reasonably cost-effective given the dispersed and changing beneficiary locations, the intermittent, and often hazardous, obstacles to access and the character of the transport sector in the region. However, further economies might have been achieved with more effort mainly in terms of number and better qualified logistics staff.

The relatively unsatisfactory track record as regards final distribution has mainly arisen as a result of ineffective institutional and organizational arrangements and the lack of a pro-active policy position to evaluate these in terms which could lead to real improvements. For the refugee populations, where UNHCR and its implementing partners are involved, liability for losses and other deficiencies are diffused through two channels, making it harder for systems to be redesigned or better controlled. Given the explicit mandate of WFP for food aid, and given its responsibility to donors, where corruption exists it must be tackled by WFP directly. Where conflicts over responsibility arise with UNHCR, agreements must be renegotiated in order to allow WFP to carry out its tasks effectively - of feeding the hungry poor, and of reporting to donors for all food given.

(End px)

Identifying and enumerating the populations at risk and their food needs

There are marked differences in abilities to cope across the refugee and displaced populations which have sometimes been neglected in generalizations such as "the integration of refugees into host family households in areas with functioning markets" and internally displaced populations' access to local means of support.

Registration is carried out in a number of ways, and by different types of agencies. Problems have been experienced, partly due to the inherent difficulties of counting large numbers of people. This has been compounded by the "self-settling" nature of the refugee and IDP influxes, which has made it very difficult to differentiate between intended beneficiaries and local populations. The changing security situation throughout the period in question and the proximity to people' homes of many safe havens for refugees and IDPs have created further problems as new influxes arrive into areas, and as people have attempted to return home. Some registration systems have tended to lead to higher levels of fraud and corruption than others, increasing pressure on limited existing resources. Verifications and physical counts, although time-consuming and costly to organize, consistently addressed the problem of over-registration and thus ensured that more of WFP assistance went to the right target groups.

Major differences between the situations of the basic beneficiary population categories - refugees, internally displaced and war-affected - influence the type of problems they face. Hence, these differences require different responses. For example, due to the weakened local economies and generalized insecurity, war-affected persons and IDPs in Liberia and Sierra Leone were often in far greater need and much more reliant on WFP and other assistance than the refugee populations in Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea.

The population in Monrovia, whose normal activities have been undermined by the war, was initially referred to as internally displaced, blurring distinctions with later displaced persons in the camps of the city. While the population of Monrovia was certainly in need of general food distributions in 1990, at the height of the war, many in the region agreed that this urgency had diminished in 1992. However, general distribution continued, partly because of the political difficulties of phasing out.

Despite the recommendation made on several occasions by the joint food needs assessment missions to undertake household surveys, these were carried out only once by local consultants and only in 1994 in Cote d'Ivoire and in 1994/95 in Guinea. Funded by UNHCR, both surveys were cross-sectional and so only reflected a "snap-shot" of conditions at the particular time. Decision-making about food aid needs based on data from nutrition surveys suffers from a number of constraints such: a) restricted geographical and population coverage due to poor security; b) limited description of population surveyed, for example in terms of length of displacement and host/non-residents; and c) insufficient data on the causes of malnutrition.

In conclusion, given the lack of detailed data regarding the socio-economic characteristics of the affected populations, targeting those truly in need has proved to be even more difficult than reaching the needy areas.

(End pxi)

Meeting emergency food needs

General distribution

Widespread famine in the region was avoided, which may have been due to the increase in the absolute availability of food. There is some evidence from nutrition surveys that malnutrition rates dropped quickly when food aid in adequate quantities reached crisis areas. However, the decline in malnutrition rates noted in Liberia and Sierra Leone in areas that became accessible after having been inaccessible for protracted periods is unlikely to have been due only to inputs from WFP and other relief organizations, as commercial traffic and trade would probably have restarted simultaneously. At the same times, food aid was not always successful in meeting needs, partly because of interruptions in distribution (mainly due to security conditions) when the ration scale was inadequate to make up for previous shortfalls. (Retroactive distribution is not authorized.) However, given the security situation, WFP must be commended for the amount of food it has managed to distribute over the period.

#### Supplementary programmes

These have included a) "safety net" supplementary ration distribution for newly accessible IDP and refugee populations; b) emergency vulnerable group feeding, including therapeutic feeding centres for severely malnourished children. Safety net rations have been shown to have had a positive impact on reducing malnutrition rates in areas where data was collected, however, even the supplementary ration may not be sufficient where populations have been inaccessible for some period due to insecurity. Reports from medical NGOs running supplementary and therapeutic feeding centres in Liberia and Sierra Leone suggest that, in general, the short-term impact of the centres has been positive (individual children gained weight). However, the centres have a number of limitations. For example, the long-term impact is likely to be diminished when children are discharged into the same conditions that led them to become malnourished in the first place; providing a take-home ration has not always been found to be effective, as it may be used to feed the entire family or be sold; high numbers of defaulters have been reported from some centres. Furthermore, the cost of running feeding centres is high: the monthly cost of food alone is about four times higher than that of the basic ration. While supplementary and therapeutic feeding may be essential in crisis situations, in view of the above limitations, the question is raised whether food allocated for this purpose could have been better targeted for preventive purposes rather than for curative purposes.

#### Emergency school feeding

Emergency school feeding was initiated in Liberia in 1991, operating primarily in Monrovia. In Sierra Leone, where the programme started in 1992, children from some refugee and displaced camps have received school meals. Non-camp dwellers were excluded. In the context of both countries, school meals act as an income transfer, encouraging families to send their children to school. The nutritional impact of the meal is therefore less important. There were reports that the preparation of the meal was difficult where only cereals were supplied and the school was expected to provide condiments, so children were given dry rations instead. Where school feeding has a "return to school" role, take-home distribution carried out later in the day may be as effective as providing cooked food. Unlike supplementary feeding programmes, school feeding is not directed at a vulnerable child in particular, and so diversion within the family is less problematic.  
(End pxii)

#### Coordination between organizations involved in the emergency

Policy dialogue and coordination between different UN agencies varies considerably in the region both in character and quality. The overlapping mandates of the different organizations of the UN and the fact that some groups (e.g. displaced people) are not fully provided for, means that the division of labour within the system, in practice, is blurred. In spite of the recent MOU between UNHCR and WFP, for example, problems persist, and the basic roles of these agencies need urgently to be clarified. WFP's accountability to its donors and its ability to carry out its own designated tasks are compromised by ambiguities, over for example who has the responsibility for monitoring food distribution to the refugee populations. While the mission welcomes current negotiations, it stresses the need for a major clarification of the respective mandates of all agencies involved in emergency relief work. The (late) arrival of DHA may help through the provision of a designated Emergency Relief Coordinator. However, institutional issues, such as the lack of a designated agency for the provision of non-food needs for IDP populations must also be tackled.

In Liberia, coordination was generally considered to have been good, especially in the early stages of the conflict. WFP played a lead role, partly as one of the largest United Nations agencies in the country, and due to its early return to Monrovia in 1990. Good coordination and relationships with the relief community have also been attributed to the strong personality of the WFP Country Director in office from 1991 to 1995, who enjoyed the respect and confidence of his colleagues. However, the importance of personality in this case demonstrates the arbitrary nature of the system leadership and coordination. In Guinea, for example, the crucial relationship between WFP and UNHCR was somewhat unsatisfactory during the period, although it has improved recently. This was partly due to problems inherent in the work -- the issue of case-load registration and numbers to be served had caused considerable dispute -- but again also to design problems in the system of intervention. The current renegotiation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between WFP and UNHCR is addressing some of these issues.

The ad hoc response to emergency needs as they arise has implications for the extent of the response, one example being the lack of any designated agency with responsibility for the non-food needs of the IDPs. The lack of complementary aid to IDPs undermines WFP's efforts.

Coordination mechanisms between WFP and governments, with the exception of recent arrangements with Cote d'Ivoire's Ministry of the Interior, leave much to be desired, although situations vary in the regions for different reasons.

The problems that arise in the relationship with local and international NGOs relate to issues of ambiguity of mandates and responsibilities, and the lack of effective channels for dealing with problems as they occur. Where WFP deals direct with NGOs as implementing partners, it has developed MOUs that attempt to address some of these problems. The activities of NGOs that may affect the work of WFP but which in this context are independent from it are more difficult to control. For example, in Sierra Leone there have been incidences where CRS applied a different food basket and ration scale to beneficiary groups in the same areas. In spite of the recent MOU between WFP and CRS, these incidences continue to occur.  
(End pxiii)

#### The regional approach

The regional approach has greatly facilitate delivery activities. Regional resource reallocation between countries, cross-border operations, local purchases of palm-oil, swap operations and

cost-effective delivery activities were highly positive. More specifically, the regional approach allowed decisions regarding commodity reallocation between the four countries to be made much later than would have been possible for country-specific projects. The advantages of this lag were significant in terms of optimum delivery targeting, particularly under conditions of important changes in beneficiary locations and numbers and fluctuations in the pipeline. Furthermore, the regional approach has facilitated the utilization and accounting of ITSH funds.

The drawback of this regional approach lies in its tendency to apply oversimplified standardization to the food basket and rations. As the conditions faced by displaced, refugee and resident populations were diverse, the impact of this standardization may have been to provide too much food to some populations and too little to others.

The Mission is of the opinion that the full potential of this regional approach with respect to communication, institutional learning and memory has not been realized. Of course, if the country office assumes regional functions, which in the opinion of the mission it should do, this requires strengthening of its mandate, resources and capacity.

#### Relief-rehabilitation-development linkage

The Mission' findings on this difficult issue are tentative. While recognizing the many practical constraints, the Mission felt that the potential exists to use a portion of the total relief food aid in a more productive way in complex emergencies, thereby maximizing opportunities. It is important to view such activities as being parallel to the main relief effort, but also to recognize the potential for their expansion. Positive models exist in the region, especially in Monrovia, where food for work has been used innovatively in minor ways by local NGOs. The National Volunteer Programme used food for work to support former combatants in vocational training, swamp-rice development and infrastructural rehabilitation projects. Emergency school feeding implemented in Liberia and Sierra Leone is a laudable attempt to use relief food to achieve more productive objectives. However, institutional capacity and non-food inputs are crucial ingredients for productive relief ventures and need to be established through improved coordination between local or international NGOs and other United Nations agencies.

#### Phasing out of general distribution

Various methods have been employed in attempts to ensure that the populations are helped to become self-sufficient, and to promote the efficient use of WFP' resources by targeting the neediest. The policy of gradual reduction of the ration was based on the perception of beneficiaries as having access to other means through their own "coping strategies". While some population groups and categories within them may have succeeded in gaining access to local economic activities in the four countries, this has depended on a number of factors which have not been examined in detail by the joint food needs assessment missions. Some sections of beneficiaries, particularly IDPs, have found it difficult to gain access to stable sources of income to supplement food aid. Even without detailed information, differentiation could have at least been made on the basis of how the different groups are affected by the war. Refugees in Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire have always had different needs from IDPs in camps in towns and cities.

(End pxiv)

The replacement of high-value rice with less expensive commodities (bulgur wheat in Liberia

and Sierra Leone, maize meal in Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire) was a beneficial move in that it reduced the rate of diversion and lessened the disincentive effects on the local price of rice. Bulgur wheat has a higher caloric content than polished rice. Furthermore, this shift was considered to be of a more self-targeting nature, i.e., only the most needy would have recourse to the programme. It is to be regretted that, in spite of recommendations made on more than one occasion by the joint food needs assessment missions, the decision to distribute lower-cost commodities could not have been implemented at an earlier date.

The extension of the phasing down of the ration across the different populations and the standardization of this reduced ration have failed to take into account the beneficiaries' differential access to complementary survival strategies. While IDPs (as in Greater Monrovia) and vulnerable groups within the refugee populations have received an additional allowance under the "safety net", depending on security in the former case and correct identification in the latter, the benefits received have still not always been sufficient. Reliance on very marginal activities, although difficult to measure, is widespread.

In the refugee host countries, the policy was further based on an integrated strategy, involving complementary aid in the form of non-food items provided by UNHCR and income-generating projects, to support the promotion of self-sufficiency. While provision of this complementary aid has varied considerably for the refugee populations in terms of quantity and quality, for the IDPs in Sierra Leone and Liberia it has often been completely lacking, increasing their reliance on the supplementary food provided. For the refugee populations, the household surveys reported that only four percent and six percent that arrived before 1993 in Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea, respectively, benefited from UNHCR-funded income-generating or agricultural projects.

In the Mission' view, the policy of phasing out by reducing the ration could work if the following points were taken into account: a) knowledge of beneficiaries (who they are, where they are, and what kind of needs they have at the general and household level); b) the registration procedure (designed and implemented in such a way as to get the right numbers, and the right kind of household composition data); and c) the right kind of complementary aid is provided.

Since 1996, the gradual change to targeted feeding schemes has meant that only particular segments of the affected populations receive food, i.e. households headed by women, children, rural dwellers and rural refugees who arrived in 1994 and 1995, and IDPs in rural Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the sick, disabled and elderly. Within these categories, all are treated the same. Certainly some segments have become self-sufficient. According to the household surveys in Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea, as estimated 30 to 50 percent of the refugee population that arrived before 1993 have reached a certain degree of self-sufficiency. However, it has not been possible with the data currently available to find out to which segments of the overall population they belong. As with the policy of gradual reduction of the ration, targeting (as a phase-out strategy) could be implemented in a more efficient manner through the collection and analysis of data on the populations involved, and the economic realities they face.  
(End pxv)