United Nations
World Food Programme
in China
1979 - 2009
Celebrating 30 Years of Cooperation
United Nations World Food Programme in China
1979 - 2009
Celebrating 30 Years of Cooperation
WFP food warehouse in Shandong
Chinese Ambassador to Ethiopia, His Excellency Lin Lin, visiting WFP-assisted school in Mekele in 2007, tasting school meals donated by China.
Originally established in 1979 as a means of providing relief through food assistance, the partnership between the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and the People’s Republic of China (China) expanded and transformed over the past 30 years. Together, WFP and the Chinese government helped to develop wide areas of remote rural China, moving millions of Chinese out of absolute poverty. As China demonstrated remarkable growth and achieved food self-sufficiency, it gradually shifted from a recipient to a donor to WFP. Today, WFP and the Chinese government are collaborating to provide food assistance to millions of impoverished individuals around the world, working toward the common MDG goal of eliminating global hunger.
In thirty years of operating in China, WFP ran more than 70 projects and donated almost 4 million tons of food, reaching over 30 million beneficiaries in every province and autonomous region on the country’s mainland. Previously uncultivated, mountainous terrain was rendered productive through terracing, irrigation and infrastructure projects. WFP Food-for-Work (FFW) schemes assisted communities to forge a living from their scarce land. An increased focus on the role of women led to Food-for-Training (FFT) programs that helped all villagers – male and female – unlock their potential.

The current relationship between WFP and China developed from tentative beginnings. Although the People’s Republic of China was officially recognized as the country’s sole legitimate government in a United Nations resolution in October 1971, the Chinese government did not seek international aid until 1978 when China began to rapidly open up to the outside world and reform.

In 1979, approximately 252,000 refugees, mostly Vietnamese citizens of Chinese origin, fled into China’s southern provinces. The arrival of the refugees placed a heavy burden on Chinese authorities. Now an actively engaged member of the international community, China was willing to cooperate with UN agencies and indicated to WFP that it would welcome food aid to help the new arrivals.

Working together, Chinese officials and a WFP project planning mission led by WFP’s acting Executive Director Bernardo de Azevedo Brito agreed to move the refugees from the labour-intensive projects where they were initially sent to state farms on the tropical island of Hainan and in southern Yunnan Province. This first cooperative project provided food assistance as part of the refugees’ wages while they extended farms and constructed dams, sluices, and irrigation canals.

The success of this initial food aid project prompted Chinese government officials to welcome WFP.
assistance for future development projects. The Chinese government realized the important role that WFP could play in helping to ease the burden of providing food for those Chinese who were living in absolute poverty, estimated to be around 250 million people in 1978.

Acknowledging China’s desire to avoid dependence on international food aid, WFP entered China with the goal of helping people feed themselves. Establishing its permanent presence in Beijing in September 1981, a small team of four – one international official and three local staff members – set up their headquarters in the United Nations Development Programme building located in the city’s Sanlitun diplomatic quarter. Thirty years later, the same building still houses the WFP office.

**SETTING UP WFP CHINA HEADQUARTERS IN BEIJING**

“In the beginning, we had nothing. We had to sit on packing cases in the office because there were no tables or chairs. Eventually, we ordered furniture and stationery from Hong Kong, we got a typewriter – a manual one – and we started to decorate the office. In those days, the idea of foreigners working in China was not like today. China had just started to open its doors to the outside world and we had to learn everything from scratch.”

– Gong Jianying, WFP China Administrative Secretary, then Programme Officer
Initial WFP development projects in China began by focusing on specific sectors of the agricultural economy such as forestry, fisheries and farming and some were carried out in partnership with the World Bank. “Dairy Development in and around Six Major Cities” was one WFP project aimed to help meet the growing demand in the dairy sector. From 1983-89, the project achieved its aim by doubling milk production in six major cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, Nanjing and Xian.

Early projects such as this laid the foundation for a number of successful local ventures, such as the establishment of bottled water plants and yoghurt factories. Eventually, these ventures were transferred to the private sector where they still function today.

However, initial cooperation between WFP and China on development aid projects was not an easy transition for a country that experienced decades of collectivism. Rapid changes following China’s opening up and reform of the 1970s and 80s included the establishment of the Household Responsibility System that transformed the face of the Chinese countryside. For the first time since collectivisation began in 1952, individual farmers were granted arable land use rights, which were distributed based on the size of one’s family. This led to a progressive loosening of government control over the sale of farm produce, enabling families to sell their own products on the open market.
As farmers were gradually introduced to a growing free market economy, the Chinese government saw agricultural productivity as a high priority and started implementing large agricultural sector projects. China’s total agricultural production began to show remarkable growth rates, and WFP was given the opportunity to play a role in China’s transformation.

When WFP development interventions began in the early 1980s, China witnessed an astounding growth in farmers’ incomes, averaging 15 percent per annum from 1978 to 1984. This impressive surge, triggered by a huge increase in agricultural production, was accompanied by dramatic changes in the composition of farmers’ incomes. As WFP gained momentum in China during the early 80s, and as cooperation deepened, the Chinese government encouraged more provinces to prepare project proposals to submit to WFP’s governing body for consideration. The number of WFP projects steadily increased, and the Beijing office found itself needing more local and international staff.

The momentum of reform combined with the effectiveness of the Chinese government’s implementation strategies proved to be a winning combination during initial cooperation with WFP. Following this success, WFP projects gained international recognition as examples of a successful partnership between an international organization and the Chinese government.

The Focus Shifts Westward

Emergencies throughout other parts of the world placed increasing pressure on limited resources in the mid-1980s, and international donors began to question WFP’s operations in China. Within this difficult international context, WFP Executive Director James Ingram visited Beijing in April 1986. Following his trip, Ingram reaffirmed WFP’s commitment to assisting China, asserting that the food aid was playing a useful and essential role for the Chinese people and that the Chinese government was efficiently implementing the projects.

Nevertheless, in tune with the Chinese Government’s own concerns about the country’s uneven development, WFP decided to shift away from projects in the more developed eastern seaboard regions. Instead of projects aimed at creating more diverse sources of protein to the urban Chinese diet, WFP’s attention would be focused on the less-developed inland regions that were being increasingly left behind.

Lunch at Food-for-Work site, Mizhi County, Shaanxi

THE DECISION TO FOCUS ON THE WEST

“In turning away from the relatively prosperous eastern seaboard to the poorest, underdeveloped parts of western and central China, the challenge became to ensure that the technical quality of projects was maintained. Appraisal missions spent more time in the field and technical discussions and debriefings were held on location in the provinces instead of Beijing. Case studies were introduced as part of field monitoring, and as we moved into areas populated by ethnic minorities, we added an anthropologist to appraisal missions. We also needed much more information about the project workers and beneficiaries of the land improvement measures. As we expanded, it was crucial to maintain donor confidence, so we regularly organized on-site visits for donor representatives, sometimes even top officials from donor capitals.”

– Trevor Page, WFP China Country Director 1986-1990
The remote and arid areas that became the focus of WFP projects over the next few years presented formidable challenges in terms of terrain, climate and location. However, the irrigation schemes constructed with WFP Food-for-Work assistance spread throughout the region, gradually increasing food security and raising standards of living. After irrigation canals were completed, bicycles and sewing machines started to appear; decent clothing replaced the children’s ragged dress. Then, dilapidated residences were repaired or rebuilt and within a few years, television aerials began to appear in what was once desolate countryside.

### Implementation of WFP Food Aid Programs in the West

As China’s outlook became more global, the involvement of WFP teams in the countryside helped open up remote corners of the country to new ideas. WFP’s appraisal missions were often the first foreigners to visit some of the locations. Sometimes WFP staff members were greeted as if they were visiting diplomats. In rural communities, large greeting parties applauded the arrival of WFP teams and performances were staged in the local stadiums. In some cases, the local authorities built special accommodations because they didn’t consider the previous residences suitable for housing foreign guests.
WFP’s primary food contributions to China came in the form of wheat, which was delivered in bulk to the port nearest the project area. In an ingenious way around China’s vast area, arriving grain was deposited into the Chinese government’s stocks and an equal quantity and quality of wheat, flour, or rice was withdrawn from the grain stations located in project areas. Some food donations were physically transported by rail from the port to the railhead nearest the project and then driven to the project area’s grain stores. WFP food aid lessened the burden on the Chinese government, which was able to use its limited resources to improve education, health and sanitary conditions in these vulnerable areas.

The provision of WFP food aid to poor, food-insecure households helped families throughout China meet their immediate needs. WFP also assisted families to build assets that would provide more sustainable livelihoods. Some WFP projects supported education and healthcare for the long-term well-being of the beneficiaries.

Chinese families, particularly the female members, were encouraged to attend training in areas such as functional literacy and farming techniques as part of Food-for-Training schemes. The combination of food and training provided an added incentive for families to participate in WFP projects such as construction, land-levelling and irrigation canal work. In addition, WFP projects helped families diversify their farm produce and develop other sideline activities.
With low annual rainfall and harsh weather conditions, Gansu had always been one of the provinces with the greatest difficulty in growing enough food to feed its people. Located in the northwestern region of the country, Gansu is part of the Loess Plateau, which, despite its position on the upper reaches of the Yellow River, is one of China’s most drought-afflicted regions. With WFP assistance, rural farmers in Gansu built irrigation systems that pumped water out of the Yellow River, improving the living conditions of a population that at times was barely able to survive off the land.

Within Gansu Province, WFP worked to aid the drought-laden southern district of Dingxi as well as the central northern counties of Jintai and Gulang, where rainfall is minimal. Despite the harsh climate in these areas, the land is both flat and fertile; yet the farmers who attempted to make a living off it were plagued by poverty and pitifully low production. This was partly due to limited government finances, which left inadequate funds for improving the agricultural land, developing farms, creating a domestic water supply, and cultivating new forests.

In 1984, the provincial government of Gansu attempted to make use of the plentiful water in the Yellow River, some 50 kilometres away, by beginning construction of a project to pump river water into areas in need.
However, the project stalled due to a lack of funds and the provincial government applied for WFP assistance to complete its unfinished project. “Agricultural Development through Irrigation, Jingtaichuan Command Area, Gansu Province” was approved to aid local agriculture by irrigating the land and planting trees. In addition, WFP planners also set about improving infrastructure by building thousands of new homes for the 115,000 people that were resettled into the project area. Along with this measure, 100 schools and dozens of village clinics and township hospitals were rebuilt.

The results were remarkable. In a location where local farmers once were barely able to make a living off the land, by the project’s completion date in 1995, local grain production rose by 638 percent in comparison to 1989 figures. Additionally, the average income per capita increased to 642 RMB, a considerably larger sum than what the project initially estimated.

CONDITIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS IN GANSU

“The area of Gansu Province with the harshest conditions is the southern district of Dingxi; it is very badly affected by drought. When I visited the area, drinking water was a serious problem. Local farmers created a few water cisterns that collected rainwater to make use of it all year round. With assistance from the WFP, we were able to help the farmers dig the cisterns, which was an enormous help in solving the problem of drinking water and then the problem of food.”

– He Kang, Former Chinese Minister of Agriculture 1983-1990

Like other WFP project areas throughout China, Food-for-Work schemes were a key strategy utilized in Gansu to fight poverty. Farmers were paid in grain for their work on irrigation channels, land improvement and drinking water facilities. These were accompanied by Food-for-Training programs, which concentrated on helping the residents, particularly women, improve their farming skills, literacy, health and income-generating sideline activities.

Mountainous regions in Gansu Province saw incredible results that are demonstrated by the figures for one such WFP project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Beneficiaries</th>
<th>936,177 (48% female)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food-for-Work (FFW) Participants</td>
<td>221,732 (50% female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food-for-Training (FFT) Participants</td>
<td>418,175 (61% female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Water Cisterns Built</td>
<td>11,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking Water Systems Built</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation Cisterns Built</td>
<td>5,336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dams Built</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Terraces</td>
<td>1,594 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Grassland, Cash Crops, Firewood and Water Conservation Forest</td>
<td>5,446 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Roads Constructed</td>
<td>61 kilometres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Figures as of May 2005)
Students at Wang Ji Primary School in Gansu
One key problem that plagued Gansu Province was the low number of students enrolled in primary school. A 2004 WFP survey conducted in Gansu revealed low primary school enrolment rates, high levels of dropout and generally low attendance, especially for young girls living in the rural areas. In some areas of the province, attendance rates for girls were discovered to be as low as 30 percent.

The main causes of these shocking findings included:
- Inability of poor households to afford the 40 RMB (US $5) tuition fees each semester;
- Reliance on children for farm labour and household chores;
- Traditional perceptions that education for girls is less important than it is for boys;
- Remoteness of schools; and
- Poor quality of education.

In order to combat this problem, WFP established a school meal programme in Gansu Province, to which over 400 tons of food were allocated from its Integrated Rural Development Project in addition to 107 tons donated by TNT Group, an international logistics and mail delivery company. As a result, a total of 9,420 girls received rations to take home to their families to encourage them to continue their education instead of dropping out of school.

On June 20, 2004, WFP organized a Walk-the-World event with TNT, seeking donations for the school meal programme at a private sector awards dinner with Hewlett-Packard, Oracle, CBN and CNBC. These contributions helped purchase enough food in 2005 to facilitate the return of an additional 2,500 girls who previously dropped out of primary school in Gansu Province.
Promoting HIV/AIDS Awareness in Gansu

Project areas in Gansu Province also exemplified the incorporation of HIV/AIDS awareness programs into WFP Food-for-Training schemes, an additional feature of training that WFP first adopted in 2001. Operating in close cooperation with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), WFP gained constructive advice on materials and curriculum for FFT activities. With access to the remote rural areas of China, WFP had a unique opportunity to help prevent the spread of the virus.

In a joint assessment of HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care in China published in 2003, the Chinese Ministry of Health and the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS identified the following potential sources of a widespread epidemic:

- An increase in high-risk behaviour;
- Lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS and social discrimination;
- High prevalence of reproductive tract infections among rural women;
- Blood transfusions in rural treatment centres;
- Significant regional disparities in economic development; and
- A large migrant population.

According to statistics provided by the Gansu Provincial Department of Health in May 2005, 147 new cases of HIV/AIDS arose in the province with...
half of them occurring among women. With the help of WFP, training programmes were implemented to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS, addressing the lack of knowledge surrounding the transmission of the virus. Approximately 400,000 farmers in Gansu, of which 80 percent were women, received this training.
In the mid- to late-1980s, the provision of wheat from donor countries to China through WFP reached peak volumes. Between 1986 and 1988, China received an average of 400,000 tons of WFP development aid per year – China was WFP’s largest project by a large margin at the time. The elevated quantities allowed WFP to assist record numbers of projects, reaching an increasing number of beneficiaries.

The motives behind this surge in food donations were several-fold and included:
- Donor confidence in WFP as the organization increasingly defined its role as a vehicle for effective development aid and emergency assistance;
- International support for China’s economic reforms and recognition of the Chinese government’s commitment to tackling the domestic issue of poverty; and
- Abundance of grain in international coffers combined with China’s efficient project implementation that allowed for easy absorption of grain to benefit those in poor and remote areas of the country.

As WFP became increasingly engaged with the Chinese government, the two worked together to improve the deployment of international assistance in China. In order to be more efficient and successful, new ideas were incorporated into WFP projects, including:
- Enhanced appraisal procedures;
- Inclusion of anthropologists in missions to better assess the social impact; and
- More detailed beneficiary profiles.

Such changes allowed WFP to better understand the individual projects and the strengths and weaknesses of the implementing authorities.

In addition, China’s increasing economic decentralization also impacted WFP operations throughout the country.
CHANGES FOLLOWING DECENTRALIZATION

“Our relationship with the Ministry of Agriculture started to evolve as they started to decentralize their activities to the provincial level. When I arrived, the way we operated was very different: projects would come up from the provinces, then we would polish or design them to fit into a mold, and then they were pushed back down to the provinces. But as the provinces started to pay more (of the operational costs), we began to negotiate activities with the provinces rather than the central government.”

– Thomas Lecato, WFP China Project Officer 1987-1991

An Example of a Project During the Peak Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Agricultural Development Through Improved Drainage and Irrigation in Anhui Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Anhui Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiaries</td>
<td>401,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WFP Food</td>
<td>35,000 tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Project  Value</td>
<td>≈US $47.5 million, including US $15 mil. from the World Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Started</td>
<td>April 1, 1984 for a duration of 3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background: With moderate precipitation, sunshine, a warm climate and a long frost-free period, the project area located in the North China Plain was suitable for the development of agricultural production. However, the area was plagued by alternating weather patterns that resulted in a monsoon climate, uneven rainfall and frequent droughts, floods and other natural disasters. Poor soil also hampered agricultural production.

Objectives: The main goal of the project was to increase agricultural production by improving the drainage and irrigation system. This included excavating the drainage system, constructing and rehabilitating wells for irrigation, land levelling, road construction and planting of trees alongside roads and within villages. The immediate objectives of this project were to control and eliminate the devastating effects of floods, waterlogging and drought.

Project Area: The project area was implemented in Mengcheng, Guoyang and Suixi counties in the northern part of the province along the Huai River plain.

Beneficiaries: This project reached 400,000 beneficiaries and included the participation of 103,200 labourers, of which women constituted 31 percent of the total.

Activities: WFP food aid increased the food supply and reduced farmers' economic burden. It functioned as an incentive to encourage farmers to participate in the construction activities with more enthusiasm, thus speeding up the implementation and raising the quality of the works. The actual projects works that were completed included the construction of a drainage system, an irrigation system, bridges, roads, sluices and the re-forestation of trees throughout the region.
By the 1990s, the surge in food donations took a turn and it was becoming clear that the amount of resources available to WFP for development projects was declining, as donor countries placed an increased emphasis on emergency relief operations. China’s rapid economic growth was also making it difficult to justify donor commitments at the previously high levels. In order to maximize its utility, WFP began to embark on new, important partnerships in its China operations.

Beginning in 1993, extensive discussions were held concerning the possible collaboration between WFP and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialized agency of the United Nations. There was strong international pressure for UN agencies to harmonize their programme cycles, and with both WFP and IFAD headquartered in Rome, a field partnership seemed to be the next step. In 1995, WFP’s collaboration with the Chinese government expanded to include IFAD, with projects co-financed by WFP and IFAD with involvement of the Chinese Rural Credit Cooperatives (RCC).

The two agencies shared common goals of alleviating rural poverty and improving household food security. However, IFAD differed from WFP in that it assisted developing countries through loans, enabling beneficiaries to develop cash crops, livestock, fish farming and other income-generating activities.

Apart from the key element of improving access by the poor to microcredit, IFAD’s project approaches also included:
- Better targeting at the township level;
- Stronger village level participation in planning and implementing projects;
- Specific social and income generation skills training; and
- Gender-specific focus to address the particular needs of women and men.

Specific factors in the WFP/IFAD partnership in China included:
- A shared vision of “graduating” households out of poverty by first addressing basic consumption needs, then household food security and finally improving...
their access to micro-finance services to generate cash income and sustain livelihoods;

- A joint approach to their Chinese government counterpart, the Ministry of Agriculture; and
- The desire to target the poorest counties and townships – mainly mountainous and ethnic minority areas – through the use of WFP’s Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) system.

**A BENEFICIAL ALLIANCE**

“IFAD was using microcredit to do very similar things that WFP was doing. With WFP food aid, we were reaching the poorest people, but microcredit cannot reach the poorest people. And IFAD came under pressure to do just that. There was an interest for IFAD to improve their targeting of specific populations, and from our side, we believed IFAD investment would benefit the longer-term strategy of the programme. The idea of collaboration came from mutual discussions between IFAD and WFP. Normally, governments try to keep us apart, but when we joined IFAD, we could invest less to achieve the same objective. With the joining of microcredit and development aid, much more could be done; WFP could subsidize individuals so that they could benefit from the IFAD microcredit.”

– Chris Czerwinski, WFP China Deputy Country Director 1994-1998

Working together, the two agencies sharpened their way of addressing poverty and demonstrated their widespread and tangible impact in China. The combination of WFP and IFAD inputs allowed international assistance to lift people out of poverty and help them benefit from microcredit and start income-generating projects.

From the perspective of the Chinese government, the collaboration between WFP and IFAD was welcome. The joint projects combined grant and loan funding, doubling the available resources from foreign donors, and thus reducing the government’s risk of taking an IFAD loan. Of course, it also reduced the burden of preparing and reporting on separate donor projects and hosting separate donor missions to the project areas. The partnership also increased China’s own capacity for project preparation and formulation by reducing dependency on international consultants.

The synergy achieved between the two agencies and the Chinese government had a striking impact on the overall boost in programme effectiveness. The partnership between WFP and IFAD in China became a model that would be replicated in several other countries in which they operate.
An Example of a Joint WFP/IFAD Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Integrated Agricultural Development Project in the Southwestern Mountain Area of Anhui Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Anhui Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiaries</td>
<td>436,000 (65% female)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total WFP Food</td>
<td>14,000 tons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Project Value</td>
<td>≈US $56 million, including IFAD costs of US $26.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Started</td>
<td>January 1, 1999 for a duration of 5 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Executive Summary: Located in one of the poorest provinces of China, this joint WFP/IFAD project aimed to alleviate poverty and train women in poor households. WFP food aid and IFAD credit investments were integrated through a new type of WFP/IFAD initiative that provided food for technical training for the beneficiaries of IFAD microcredit.

Objectives: The long-term objectives of this project were to achieve food security; increase the income of poor rural families and improve the living conditions in a sustainable way through integrated agricultural and social development.

The immediate objectives were to: 1) increase crop production; 2) facilitate and increase access to credit; 3) increase household cash income by providing credit to farmers for income generating activities; 4) improve communication and access to markets through rural road construction; 5) improve the skills of rural people and increase their capacity for self-help; and 6) improve the health of the target population.

Project Area: The project area consisted of 438 villages within 34 townships located in the five counties of Jinzhai, Huoshan, Yuexi, Qianshan and Taihu.

Beneficiaries: About 436,000 people in over 100,000 households.

Activities: WFP assistance was used to support Food-for-Training schemes, including technical training in water management, crop production, tree planting, livestock and fisheries and women’s training in literacy, income-generating skills development and basic health care. The expansion also supported the construction of drinking water supplies through Food-for-Work initiatives.
Food distribution in Guixi, Guangxi
PARTNERSHIP: AusAID

In the 1990s WFP China initiated a partnership with the Australian Government’s Overseas Aid Program (AusAID), and AusAID began to channel a significant amount of its rural development budget in China through WFP.

AusAID primarily focused its aid in China on tackling the major issues of health, environment and governance. While assisting with on-going improvements in government policy reform, regional trade and investment, AusAID also focused on social issues. The organization shared WFP’s interests in strengthening health systems to reduce the spread of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and address water resource management.

A CREATIVE ALLIANCE

“AusAID had a very attractive and engaged role in China. It was a creative donor that was willing to take risks – the sort of thing that China needed at the time. People were hungry for small-scale capital because some of the banking regulations, interest rates and hoops that people had to jump through to get individual loans were still difficult. Using WFP as a financial conduit was a bit out of the ordinary for AusAID, so we examined and built upon the successful model of our IFAD projects. They said, ‘Let’s link your ability to disburse food with our ability to disburse cash and then we can have a Cash-for-Work programme and a Food-for-Work programme and people can make their own choices.’”

– Richard Ragan, WFP China
Deputy Country Director 1998-2000
**An Example of a Joint WFP/AusAID Project**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Wuling Mountains Rural Development Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Guizhou Province</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiaries</td>
<td>190,000 households</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Project Value</td>
<td>≈US $13 million, with AusAID covering 50% of overall costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Started</td>
<td>April 17, 2000 for a duration of 3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Objectives:** This joint WFP/AusAID project aimed at improving the living conditions and reducing poverty among the minority population in the project area. The three basic components of the project included: 1) the construction of rural roads; 2) the provision of safe drinking water facilities; and 3) the construction and renovation of clinics and hospitals.

Additional healthcare training components were included that were comprised of health staff training, review of training materials, supply of basic drugs and medical equipment and basic health and sanitation training for villagers.

**Project Area:** Seven selected counties in Qian Dong Nan Prefecture in southwestern Guizhou Province.

**Beneficiaries:** Around 190,000 minority farming households.

**Activities:** The project activities were executed in a labour-intensive manner and relied predominately on the active participation of the beneficiaries themselves. The main activities included the construction of roads, wells and water retention ponds and healthcare facilities, as well as the provision of training.

The main WFP contributions can be summarized as follows:
- Six stretches of grade 4 road built for a total length of 88km;
- Four large motor-pumped wells constructed;
- 1,871 wells rehabilitated and 547 water retention ponds constructed;
- Eight township hospitals and 186 village clinics built and supplied with medical equipment and medicine;
- Some 100,000 villagers received basic healthcare training, including HIV/AIDS awareness, and 384 clinic staff received health training; and
- 38 teachers and 10,000 school children received sex education and HIV/AIDS awareness training.

![Ethnic women taking part in HIV/AIDS awareness training in Guizhou](image)
A CRUCIAL FORCE: TARGETING & EMPOWERING WOMEN

Despite the late Chairman Mao Zedong’s saying, “Women hold up half the sky,” giving substance to this ideal was a continuing challenge as WFP’s assistance programmes unfolded. The process of garnering women not just the command of a wheelbarrow on Food-for-Work project sites, but also fair representation in management and decision-making bodies, was gradual.

The United Nations Women’s Conference held in Beijing in 1995 helped focus WFP strategy more sharply on the importance of gender issues in the fight against poverty, a change that had already gained prominence with the appointment of WFP’s first female Executive Director, Catherine Bertini, in 1992. These priorities were increasingly reflected in WFP’s China Country Programme through a range of projects aimed at reinforcing women’s skills with an emphasis on gender and training components.

INVOLVING WOMEN

“In one particular project, I participated from the feasibility study to preparation and launching. I was able to talk to both the local project group and the steering group about the whole business of involving women in the activities. That was a time when, despite Mao’s reminder that ‘women hold up half the sky,’ men were designing and running the projects and not taking women seriously. We didn’t make great progress, but they were open to a dialogue not only about how the women were involved in the project but also about the way women were involved in the management committee.”

THE FEMALE EFFECT

“I think the fact that I was the first female Country Director – not to pat myself on the shoulder – was what made a difference. The Ministry of Agriculture actually put more women into counterpart positions and project management offices. We were advocating for more women to have management positions and it actually happened, partly because it was an aspect of WFP’s commitment to women, but also the fact that they were dealing with a woman as head of the office. When we had vacancies, we also appointed a few professional women in the office and even appointed one national staff member who was totally responsible for gender issues and the commitment to women. I think that was one significant reason that we were able to turn things around a bit more.”

– Else Larsen, WFP China Country Director 1997-2000

Assisted by the Food-for-Training formula, thousands of women took time away from their daily farming routine to attend literacy classes. Soon, female participants gained the ability, confidence and pride to write basic characters, sign their name and understand a simple contract that would allow them to benefit from a microcredit loan.

Functional literacy training classes were useful and effective tools for motivating and empowering women, providing them with knowledge and skills for life. Materials developed for the training courses focused on reading, writing and simple mathematical calculations in addition to learning practical skills in areas of nutrition, hygiene and farm production.

The basic principles of the curriculum and methodology were:
- A simple message;
- A focus on local needs;
- Maximizing the use of pictures and graphics;
- Encouraging students’ participation and interest in learning; and
- An orientation that reflected the priorities of the adult female target group.

WFP underpinned its commitment to boosting the role of women with concrete targets and the programmes’ close involvement with the All China Women’s Federation aided in their success. In addition, WFP’s targeting and monitoring systems were made more gender-sensitive, reflecting the greater emphasis on women’s needs.

However, the increased emphasis on the role of women and gender issues was not exempt from criticism. Some argued that the new strategy actually increased the burden on women.

Those who advocated for greater attention to gender pointed out that WFP projects in a particular district or village created employment opportunities for men, which benefited women as well. In order to feed their families, men needed to migrate to the cities for part of the year to earn an income. By improving productivity and fostering local income generation, WFP helped reduce their time away from home. By supporting women’s literacy training, health, nutrition and income-generation, WFP was able to increase women’s contribution to the family’s well-being. Evidence of this was demonstrated in January 2002, when a study on gender issues concluded that WFP was successful in providing food aid directly to women in China, promoting their role in decision-making and enhancing their development capacities.
RESPONDING TO DISASTER:
1998 FLOODS

The Yangtze River and other main waterways throughout China are often prone to flooding and the destruction that follows. In the spring of 1998, continuous torrential rains resulted in the country’s worst floods since 1954. Areas along the banks of the Yangtze River, which flows through central and southern China, were heavily damaged. According to official estimates, more than 3,000 individuals lost their lives; 13.8 million people were evacuated; nearly 5 million homes were destroyed and 15 million farmers lost their crops. The floods also devastated huge numbers of health clinics, schools and water supply facilities, as well as roads, bridges and factories.

As a counter-measure, the Chinese government deployed troops to help with the relief efforts and activated all of its own emergency measures. For the first time, China appealed for international aid on behalf of the flood victims.

FLOOD PRESSURE

“I still remember the exact date that I started my job at WFP. I had just come into the bureau in the midst of summer holidays and my first letter, the only letter in my inbox, was a request from the Chinese government for emergency assistance for the floods with a note from my Regional Director asking me to ‘Please prepare a reply.’ That was my first day at the job and it wasn’t easy to prepare. This was a very interesting period in our relations with China. There was no doubt that these were very large catastrophic floods that really put the Chinese government under pressure. It was the first time that the government officially requested international emergency assistance.”

– Rasmus Egendal, WFP Programme Coordinator
1998-2000
WFP responded with the project “Emergency Food Aid to Flood Affected People in Anhui, Hubei, Hunan and Jiangxi Provinces” that provided emergency relief to flood victims in the four most seriously affected provinces. In order to carry out the task of aiding these areas, the project was split into a relief phase for the first month followed by Food-for-Work and Rehabilitation for the succeeding three months.

Operations in Hunan and Hubei Provinces were run from a temporary office set up in a hotel in Lixian County, Hunan. The nine staff members, including six food monitors, only had a basic set of equipment with which to operate: three laptops, three printers, one telephone, two mobile phones and three rented vehicles in which they covered over 15,000 kilometres during the 86 days that the emergency sub-office was in operation. Despite the limited resources, they were still able to play a valuable role in helping the region recover from the flood devastation.

Although the timing of the assistance on the ground presented formidable challenges, WFP responded exceptionally fast. The emergency assistance helped the Chinese government meet the acute needs of the population living in temporary shelters and re-establish essential infrastructure and services. Over 5.7 million beneficiaries were provided with a daily ration of 500g of rice. During the second phase of the operation, beneficiary farmers took part in Food-for-Work activities such as restoring drinking water facilities and clearing land. The total cost of the project was US $146 million, of which WFP contributed US $88 million.

FARMLAND TRANSFORMATION

“When WFP staff members arrived in the project areas in early December 1998, only some farmlands had been planted with rapeseed, vegetables and other crops. At that time, most of the farmland was still bare and waterlogged. One month later, by mid-January, the farmland had turned into an oasis. Similar significant changes also occurred as irrigation canals were freed of silt and the roads to the markets were repaired. After the disaster, the victims and the Chinese government considered the housing and drinking water system repairs to be the top priority and invested a large amount of manpower and financial support toward that goal. By the Spring Festival, all the flood victims had moved into their repaired or newly-constructed houses and had clean drinking water.”

– Liu Wei, WFP China Programme Associate

WFP food aid transported by railway
PHASING OUT: THE PHILOSOPHY

The Chinese government’s formidable capacity to design and implement projects has long impressed WFP officers and donors as its efforts have produced some of the best food assistance and development results in the world. As well as propelling China to model status, the country’s distinguished performance also gradually fostered the belief among many that WFP assistance, especially development aid, was on the way to becoming redundant. China’s economic and technological achievements began to convince the international community that Beijing possessed the means to resolve problems of poverty through its own efforts.

As early as the 1980s, such thinking increasingly began to gain support, as many donors believed that WFP’s comparative advantage lay in emergency assistance for regions of the world racked by acute hunger and the share of WFP resources devoted to emergencies rose in comparison with that of its development activities.

To address international concerns and limited resources WFP’s operations were organized into Country Programmes (CP). The China Country Programme would form the final years of the organization’s assistance from 2001 to 2005. It adopted a multi-pronged strategy to the complex social and economic issues that contribute to poverty in rural China:

**Constraints in Project Areas**
- Frequent natural disasters
- Limited access to markets
- Lack of safe drinking water
- Poor healthcare
- Limited access to education and training

**WFP’s Response**
- Land development and irrigation
- Water and soil conservation
- Social infrastructure
- Investment in human capacity

![WFP Food Aid Deliveries to China 1979-2008](chart.png)
During the five year period, the Chinese government agreed to increase its counterpart funding – the resources made available by the recipient country to support WFP projects. From the initial agreement to match WFP resources on a 1:1 basis, the Chinese government raised the ratio to 2:1. The elevated counterpart contribution covered food aid for projects, payment of all internal transport and storage and food handling costs. Beijing also agreed to cover the cost of ocean freight for WFP food shipments – the first such undertaking by a recipient country in WFP relations.

All of these additional measures that the Chinese government adopted gained widespread support among WFP donors and were immediately approved by WFP’s Executive Board.

**Sustainability**

As WFP began working toward phasing out its domestic assistance in China, the sustainability of projects became an ever more important issue.

There were several key approaches to ensuring sustainability. The first was to increase the involvement of beneficiaries in the actual project design stage through Participatory Rural Appraisal exercises. A greater emphasis on building social infrastructure such as roads, domestic water storages and health centres, which already began in the mid-1990s, became a second important focus under the 2001-2005 Country Programme. In addition to helping improve overall sustainability, these measures also lightened the daily workload of the beneficiaries, especially the women.

However, significant obstacles also had to be overcome in order to ensure the sustainability. Upgrading, maintaining and operating major irrigation schemes required important investments that needed to be reflected in the production costs at the farm level instead of the current situation in which the Chinese government was bearing the costs.

In addition, main buildings and inter-farm canals that fell under the responsibility of the Water Conservancy Administration were well maintained and operated; however, on-farm canals were not included in the construction and were not always completed. In many cases, this hampered the potential efficiency of irrigation systems.

Training schemes played a growing role in WFP-assisted projects and the knowledge gained by farmers remained with them, even if their impact was hindered at times by outdated teaching methods and content that was not always suited to the farmers’ level of education, living conditions and needs.

The environmental impact of projects also remained a challenge and continued measures to avoid environmental threats such as salinization were needed.

---

**PLANNING THE PHASE-OUT**

“In terms of delivery, there was a very clear plan. We had a goal to start handing operations over to the Chinese government through capacity building. Instead of just putting in the resources, we were going to train the people and leave some knowledge behind. IFAD was a very important factor in the phase-out plan because in some of the projects we would leave but IFAD would continue. I think it was very important that we had projects where the common objectives would be continued by IFAD in cooperation with the Chinese government.”

– Yuriko Shoji, WFP China
Deputy Country Director 2001-2004
As projects orchestrated under the China Country Programme neared completion, attention focused on the manner in which WFP-assisted projects would continue after the programme came to a close. Completed in 2000, “Poverty Alleviation and Environmental Rehabilitation in Three Upland Counties in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region” was an encouraging example of how the phase-out process could be successfully implemented.

The project spanned over three counties and was designed to improve conditions in a region that suffered from critical water and soil erosion, a result of the area’s climatic extremes that included severe dryness in spring and summer and heavy rainfall in autumn. The plan was composed of twelve sub-projects that ranged from water conservancy to functional literacy and technical training. After the WFP-assisted project achieved improvements in the region and arrived at its official date of completion, these initiatives continued to be well maintained and developed further under independent programmes led by the Chinese government.

**Keeping the Water Coming**

Many villages in the project area benefited from a sub-project directed toward improving drinking water conditions and the small community of Cao He exemplified the success of the initiative.

Inside one of Cao He’s newly built brick houses, 33 year old Wan Renmei filled a metal basin with water from a tap that stood in the corner of the room. While a seemingly everyday action, Ms. Wan did not take it for granted because drinking water had only been brought to the rural community very recently. Before, village women walked for three hours to fetch water – a trip that Ms. Wan made at least twice daily while her husband was busy labouring in the family fields or feeding the oxen. With WFP’s assistance, villagers could fill up bottles and containers at a common tap in the village.
After the completion of the WFP project, the Chinese Government worked to extend the drinking water system from communal distribution points directly into individual villagers’ houses. The results of this initiative improved the lives of the local people significantly, demonstrated by the ease with which Ms. Wan could now get the water she needed to make noodles from the family’s potato crops. From this enterprise, she was able to earn around RMB 15,000 per year, a financial improvement that enabled her family to construct a multi-room house adjacent to their previous mud-and-straw dwelling. Along with this, the shed opposite the family’s yard was now home to a new bright blue tractor-trailer.

A close neighbour of Ms. Wan, Ma Xiuying, stood proudly in her apple orchard among a scattering of extravagantly coloured dahlias. Surrounded by her extended family, she showed off a basket of rosy red apples – her latest crop. “Ten years ago,” she said, “there were no flowers or fruit here. Nothing.”

In Huang Wan Catchment area, the scenery was once an expanse of bare hills. However, after the WFP-assisted project, the landscape was covered in buckthorn bushes that conserve precious moisture and prevent erosion. Forests were planted nearby for the joint purposes of ecology protection, growing cash crops and as a source of timber. With the added bonus of receiving cash income, farming families had plenty of incentive to continue planting trees, in turn, continuing the preservation of the landscape.

After WFP completed the project, measures were taken to continue promoting new varieties of crops and provide training to farmers on how to best grow these unfamiliar plants. The initiative resulted in the tripling of the amount of revenue that was extracted from each mu (approximately 0.067 hectare) of land.

Additional Successful Phase-Outs

Following the example of the Ningxia Hui project, additional projects pursued under the Country Programme continued to produce equally promising results of sustainability and further development.

In Ding Tang Village located in Tongxin County, 39 concrete-lined cisterns replaced old earthen reservoirs and were equipped with settlement ponds to filter the water raised by six pumping stations from the Yellow River.Concrete irrigation canals were also added along the main street of the village, allowing for the transport of water directly into the community’s apple orchards that constituted an important source of income for the village’s 1,200 residents.

Ma Yaolin and his wife Ma Shulun, both 35, were extremely happy when their land became much more fertile after the completion of a cistern in their own yard. “We now get 100 RMB more per mu out of the land,” boasted Mr. Ma. In addition to the apple trees stretching across their land, the couple also gained more income from planting maize, wheat and sunflowers. Like many other villagers, they invested some of the extra money into the construction of a spacious new house.

The Contribution of Technology and Forests

The Fengzhuang Catchment area displayed an array of the project’s beneficial agricultural features including terraces used for growing crops and forests of newly planted trees that conserve moisture.

In the years following the completion of the WFP-assisted project, there was a steady focus on acquiring the necessary technology to grow seasonal crops such as winter wheat and continuing training schemes for farmers. Even after the WFP left this newly thriving landscape, continued development was carried out through plans that included growing medicinal herbs to address local health concerns and potatoes that could be processed into noodles and sold as a lucrative activity.

In Huang Wan Catchment area, the scenery was once an expanse of bare hills. However, after the WFP-assisted project, the landscape was covered in buckthorn bushes that conserve precious moisture and prevent erosion. Forests were planted nearby for the joint purposes of ecology protection, growing cash crops and as a source of timber. With the added bonus of receiving cash income, farming families had plenty of incentive to continue planting trees, in turn, continuing the preservation of the landscape.

After WFP completed the project, measures were taken to continue promoting new varieties of crops and provide training to farmers on how to best grow these unfamiliar plants. The initiative resulted in the tripling of the amount of revenue that was extracted from each mu (approximately 0.067 hectare) of land.

Additional Successful Phase-Outs

Following the example of the Ningxia Hui project, additional projects pursued under the Country Programme continued to produce equally promising results of sustainability and further development.

In Ding Tang Village located in Tongxin County, 39 concrete-lined cisterns replaced old earthen reservoirs and were equipped with settlement ponds to filter the water raised by six pumping stations from the Yellow River. Concrete irrigation canals were also added along the main street of the village, allowing for the transport of water directly into the community’s apple orchards that constituted an important source of income for the village’s 1,200 residents.

Ma Yaolin and his wife Ma Shulun, both 35, were extremely happy when their land became much more fertile after the completion of a cistern in their own yard. “We now get 100 RMB more per mu out of the land,” boasted Mr. Ma. In addition to the apple trees stretching across their land, the couple also gained more income from planting maize, wheat and sunflowers. Like many other villagers, they invested some of the extra money into the construction of a spacious new house.
In almost thirty years of WFP involvement in China, the country programme experienced both the difficulties and the successes of operating in a country that recently opened itself up to the outside world and was still learning how to interact with the international organizations that accompanies membership in the global community. During WFP and China’s collaboration, several lessons were learned concerning development aid that can help other programmes and projects be successful in the future:

- WFP food aid can play a major role as a catalyst for the enhancement of a country’s development process. WFP’s approach and the projects in China were adopted as successful models for other programmes, including the Land Conversion Programme and the World Bank-funded North China Loess Plateau Programme. In addition, some areas of China such as Anshun Prefecture in Guizhou Province even utilized their own resources to extend WFP project activities.

- Coordinated government action is essential for a successful integrated approach to poverty alleviation. The Chinese government set up WFP project leading groups and management offices at all levels and provided matching funds to support WFP’s operation in China.

- Integration of various government ministries is necessary in order to efficiently implement multidimensional development projects. The structure of the Project Management Office in China aided the cross-communication between different departments when dealing with separate economic and social sectors.

- Bilateral cooperation among different United Nations agencies and international institutions
amplifies the success of WFP projects. The joint implementation of IFAD and WFP-assisted projects was a valuable experience in combining the complementary capacities of the two organizations. Many projects also benefited from the input from other UN agencies including UNICEF, WHO and UNAIDS.

Greater involvement of beneficiaries in the project life cycle – from design to implementation to completion – has a positive impact on sustainability. The introduction of Participatory Rural Appraisal methods in project preparation, planning and monitoring produced positive results that better matched the actual needs of the villagers. The creation of Village Implementation Groups and encouragement to participate in designing Village Development Plans empowered the entire village population. Greater consideration for the role of women and their involvement in project activities proved to be essential for success.

Dry land improvement and irrigation schemes developed through Food-for-Work have an important and lasting impact on household food security. The steady increase in productivity and high farmer incomes in China laid the basis for more diverse activities, social infrastructure and access to non-farming income.

Food-for-Training is essential for building human capacity but it cannot reach its full benefit as a stand-alone activity and must be part of an integrated project. FFT schemes in China were best implemented through a long-term, sustained effort that continued after project completion.

Multiple interventions in a large number of communities to reach a huge amount of beneficiaries do not result in a sustainable impact. Project resources were best utilized when targeted at a specific population on a specific project task. When the limited resources were spread out too thin, households could not benefit from the synergy between project activities.

In-depth project formulation, systematic organization of technical reviews and evaluation missions are key instruments for proper project implementation and corporate learning. The relative decrease of in-depth and mid-term reviews during the Country Programme demonstrated the need for such exercises to adapt strategies and activities during project implementation.

For a WFP Country Programme entering the phase-out stage, particular attention should be paid to ensuring a proper phasing out of the on-going development activities. Minimum staff was needed to follow up on activities and the current level of available resources, but they played an invaluable role ensuring sustainability and capitalizing on the experience gained.
OFFICIAL POLICY STATEMENT

“I wish to propose that donor countries double their donations to the World Food Program in the next five years and that the international community do more to cancel or reduce debts owed by least developed countries and give zero-tariff treatment to their exports. ….If we have those poor mothers and their hungry babies crying for food on our mind, then there is no difference that we cannot put aside and no obstacle that we cannot surmount. As long as governments have a strong sense of responsibility and mission, as long as people of all countries bring out the best of human sympathy and compassion, and as long as we unite to overcome difficulties, no matter where we come from and who we are, we will attain the MDGs.”

– Wen Jiabao, Chinese Premier, at the 2008 UN High Level Meeting on MDGs

Considering the rapid development of China’s economy and its achievement of food self-sufficiency, the country had the potential to be an incredibly valuable support to other developing countries and multilateral institutions.

Between 1979 and 2005 China received US $1 billion in WFP food aid. At the same time it showed its support to WFP operations in other countries. China gradually relinquished its initial role as a major recipient of WFP development aid. Beginning in 1981, China donated a total of US $27.55 million to WFP operations between 1981 and 2008.

■ Provision of Multilateral Aid through WFP

Many of the countries to which China gave bilateral aid were also recipients of ongoing WFP relief operations, which in some cases were critically under-funded. China’s emergence as a major donor in African and Asian countries presented the opportunity for WFP
to form a partnership with China concerning the provision of multilateral aid.

One way in which China contributed a portion of its foreign aid through WFP was in the form of grants for immediate food shortages. Increasingly suffering the constraints of limited resources, WFP urgently needed donations for development projects and relief operations. Timely Chinese donations to WFP for those African and Asian countries facing food shortages not only saved lives in the short term, but also contributed to long-term peace, stability and development.

By providing multilateral aid through WFP, the Chinese government was assured that its donations were implemented efficiently and effectively. Due to its well-established programmes in recipient countries, WFP was involved throughout the assessment, implementation and monitoring stages. With its in-country presence, knowledge and experience, the management of contributions from China was guaranteed a maximum degree of transparency and accountability as the funds targeted the people in greatest need.

■ From Prince of Gymnast to Champion against Hunger

Legendary Chinese Olympic gymnast, Mr. Li Ning, was appointed China National Ambassador against Hunger in 2009 to help WFP rally support in China to fight world hunger.

Before assuming his formal ambassadorship, Li Ning had been interested in WFP’s poverty alleviation efforts in China and beyond. At the end of 2008 Ning joined a delegation from the Government of China to witness at first hand the distribution of US $1 million (RMB 6.89 million) worth of food assistance donated by the Chinese government to mothers, orphans and people infected with HIV or tuberculosis in the Kingdom of Lesotho in southern Africa.

“As an athlete, I know how important good nutrition is for healthy growth. As a father, I know that children need all our care and support. I’m really touched by the work that WFP is doing here for kids affected by HIV,” said Mr Li Ning.

“For 26 years, WFP has helped poor farmers and their families in China to be able to feed them. It’s wonderful to see that China is now able to help other countries do the same.” Ning remarked.

Li Ning’s convincing power as a public figure and his commitment to ending hunger make him an ideal partner for WFP in China.

■ WALK THE WORLD” TOOK ITS FIRST STEP FROM CHINA

In 2003, WFP’s corporate partner, TNT, first launched the project at the Great Wall in Beijing, with a few hundred TNT employees taking part with family and friends. Due to the scheme’s success in helping WFP raise awareness and resources for its efforts to combat child hunger, it has quickly been replicated by WFP and TNT in other countries as a module for WFP to engage the private sector and the civil society.

Over the next five years, the Walk has grown into a global movement with more than 250,000 people walking the world in 2008. The resources raised through the scheme have enabled WFP to provide nutritious meals to hungry children in Asia and Africa.
China knows well the havoc that natural disasters can wreak. It has responded generously to other nations struck by floods, droughts and earthquakes.

**2004 Tsunami**

On December 26, 2004, an undersea earthquake produced a tsunami of devastating proportions. The Great Sumatra-Andaman earthquake resulted in the Indian Ocean Tsunami whose waves inundated entire coastal communities, killing more than 200,000 people in 11 countries, including the hardest hit nations of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand. As one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history, the tsunami prompted a widespread humanitarian response. In total, the international community donated more than US $7 billion in humanitarian aid to help the over 1 million displaced persons recover and rebuild.
CHINESE AID TO SRI LANKAN TSUNAMI VICTIMS

“This generous and timely assistance testifies to China’s strong sense of solidarity with a fellow Asian country still struggling to recover from the deadly disaster. It also underscores the Chinese Government’s growing commitment to multilateralism as a way of solving the world’s humanitarian and development problems.”

– James Morris, WFP Executive Director 2002-2007

“Having made unparalleled progress in reducing poverty, China is now forging a broader relationship with us that reflects our shared vision of a world free of hunger.”

– Dominique Frankefort, WFP China Deputy Country Director 2001-2005

The Chinese government wrote off US $4.3 million worth of Sri Lankan debts and promised to provide the country with preferential export buyer’s credit worth US $300 million. In an unprecedented step, the Chinese government announced it would channel $5 million aid through UN agencies, including $1 million to WFP. The total Chinese donation was used to purchase canned fish in support of WFP Food-for-Work schemes that aimed at helping Sri Lankans rebuild roads and other infrastructure damaged by the tidal surges. In return for their work reconstructing damaged public entities, FFW participants received the Chinese donations of canned fish as well as family rations of rice, lentils, sugar and oil. By cooperating closely with WFP to rebuild the Sri Lankan people’s capacity to recover from the tsunami, China’s donation achieved both self-reliance and sustainability.

Zimbabwe

In 2008, the Chinese government committed to provide of US $5 million in food aid to the Government of Zimbabwe. At the end of the year, it asked WFP to help with the transfer of this donation. This was the first time that China asked WFP to assist in its bilateral aid.

Given the urgent need for food in Zimbabwe, WFP acted quickly to purchase and distribute the food within three months. Over 7,000 tons of maize were distributed to 700,000 beneficiaries in Bulawayo, Gweru, Mashonaland, Masvingo and Mutare.
2008 Sichuan Earthquake

On May 12, 2008, an earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale hit Wenchuan County in Sichuan Province. As a result, approximately 90,000 people were killed or missing and 15 million people were evacuated from their homes. Nearly all of the evacuees relied on free food distributions from the Chinese government and non-governmental organization (NGO) channels, including WFP.

For only the second time in 30 years, the Chinese government officially requested international emergency relief, including food. WFP’s emergency food relief primarily served to help those in need immediately following the initial aftermath of the earthquake, providing assistance until the Chinese government and the Red Cross were in a position to provide regular food aid to the affected population.

In order to save and sustain lives, WFP approved a US $500,000 emergency operation that assisted 138,000 displaced people in Mianyang City, Anxian, Pingwu and Jiangyou Counties with ready-to-eat food in the first three weeks after the earthquake. WFP distributed 634.5 tons of food, most of which consisted of instant noodles, rice, wheat flour and vegetable oil.

WFP AID TO SICHUAN EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS

“The Chinese government made an all-out effort to organize relief and recovery in the hit areas. In the meantime, we have received great support and assistance from the United Nations and foreign governments. With the great relief efforts of the Chinese government, the pooled strength of the Chinese people and the attention of the international community, many lives in the hit areas were rescued; their homeland will be reconstructed and normal life will be resumed as soon as possible.”

– Sun Zhengcai, Minister of Agriculture for of China

WFP’s Chinese staff in international roles were quick to offer assistance and two of them, Liu Mei and Xie Hongyi, came from Ethiopia and Afghanistan to help with the operation. WFP coordinated with the Red Cross Mianyang Branch and the Chinese government to distribute WFP’s food aid as part of their emergency relief activities delivering food parcels to over one hundred thousand displaced persons. In addition, WFP China dispatched missions to help the Red Cross Mianying Branch formulate food distribution plans and design food rations.
Working with Red Cross colleagues in Mianyang
CONCLUSION: LOOKING FORWARD

From its humble origins in an unfurnished office, the World Food Programme’s operations in China grew to be the largest food aid donor to China during a crucial period in its history, successfully leading dozens of projects throughout impoverished regions of the country. During the late 1980s, China represented WFP’s largest operation worldwide.

While living standards throughout China steadily increase, the Chinese government continues its unremitting efforts to fight rural poverty and maintains many development projects that were originally established by WFP. These projects are now run by local governments and continue to alleviate poverty for those in need.

WFP does not play the same role in China as it once did. It is now a key player in bringing Chinese aid to developing countries all over the world. Over the last decade, China has provided millions of dollars for WFP projects, providing food and development aid to those who are in the position that many Chinese recently occupied.

As the world increasingly focuses its attention on the underclass of the hungry and impoverished, the attendant visibility of Chinese donations to WFP for developing nations will highlight China’s peaceful rise and its commitment to working with international organizations to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. WFP is proud of the partnership it has forged with China in helping lift 30 million of its own people out of poverty – one of the greatest accomplishments of the 20th century. In light of 30 years of successful collaboration, WFP hopes to move forward with China, working together towards a common vision of a world free of hunger.
Donors to WFP China Operation 1979-2008
(in alphabetic order)

- Argentina
- AusAID
- Australia
- Austria
- Canada
- Central Emergency Response Fund (UN)
- China
- Denmark
- European Union
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Ireland
- Italy
- Japan
- Netherlands
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Saudi Arabia
- Sweden
- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
- Switzerland
- TNT
- UK
- US