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# Country implementation of the Strategic Plan: the case of Uganda

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## **1. Introduction**

In June 2008, WFP's Executive Board approved a new Strategic Plan, which marked a historic shift in direction by indicating that WFP would move from being a food aid to being a food assistance organization. In practice, this change implied that WFP would no longer start with the tool – food aid – and determine how best to use it to support humanitarian and development objectives. Instead, it would begin with the problem – hunger – and identify the range of tools that were most appropriate for addressing hunger sustainably in a particular context.

WFP Uganda was one of the first country offices to pioneer the new approach. The centrepiece of its efforts is the development of a country strategy for 2009–2014, in consultation with the government and partners. The strategy identifies three new priority areas for the office, in line with the corporate plan: (i) emergency humanitarian action; (ii) food and nutrition security; and (iii) agriculture and market support. As the country strategy was developed and translated into new programme activities on the ground, WFP Uganda introduced a number of innovations – and faced a series of challenges – that provide critical lessons for the organization as it makes this far-reaching shift in approach.

This rest of this chapter is divided into four sections: section 2 describes what the Country Strategy 2009–2014 was designed to achieve; section 3 summarizes the process and the methodology used for preparing the document; section 4 explains the process of translating the plan into a new programme portfolio; and section 5 identifies some of the critical challenges and key factors for success.

## **2. A strategic document for the national level**

The arrival of a new country director at the end of June 2008 followed the approval of the new WFP Strategic Plan 2008–2011<sup>1</sup> and provided impetus for the comprehensive strategic review that was launched by the WFP Uganda country office in July 2008. The strategic review aimed to:

1. establish a strategic approach for WFP's work in the country;
2. align WFP's activities in the country with the new WFP Strategic Plan;
3. reposition WFP as a major development actor in Uganda.

### **2.1 Establishing a strategic approach for WFP's work in the country**

WFP's activities in Uganda range from emergency response to protracted relief, and medium- and longer-term development activities. Ensuring the maximum effectiveness of WFP's efforts in the country requires an approach that is comprehensive, focused and coherent. This means having a clear conception of WFP's role in Uganda, its comparative advantages, and its potential for longer-term impacts, and includes the need to disentangle short-term emergency and protracted relief activities from recovery and medium- and longer-term development activities. The strategic review aimed to achieve not only greater coherence for country office activities, but also reduced overlap among programmes, and greater transparency.

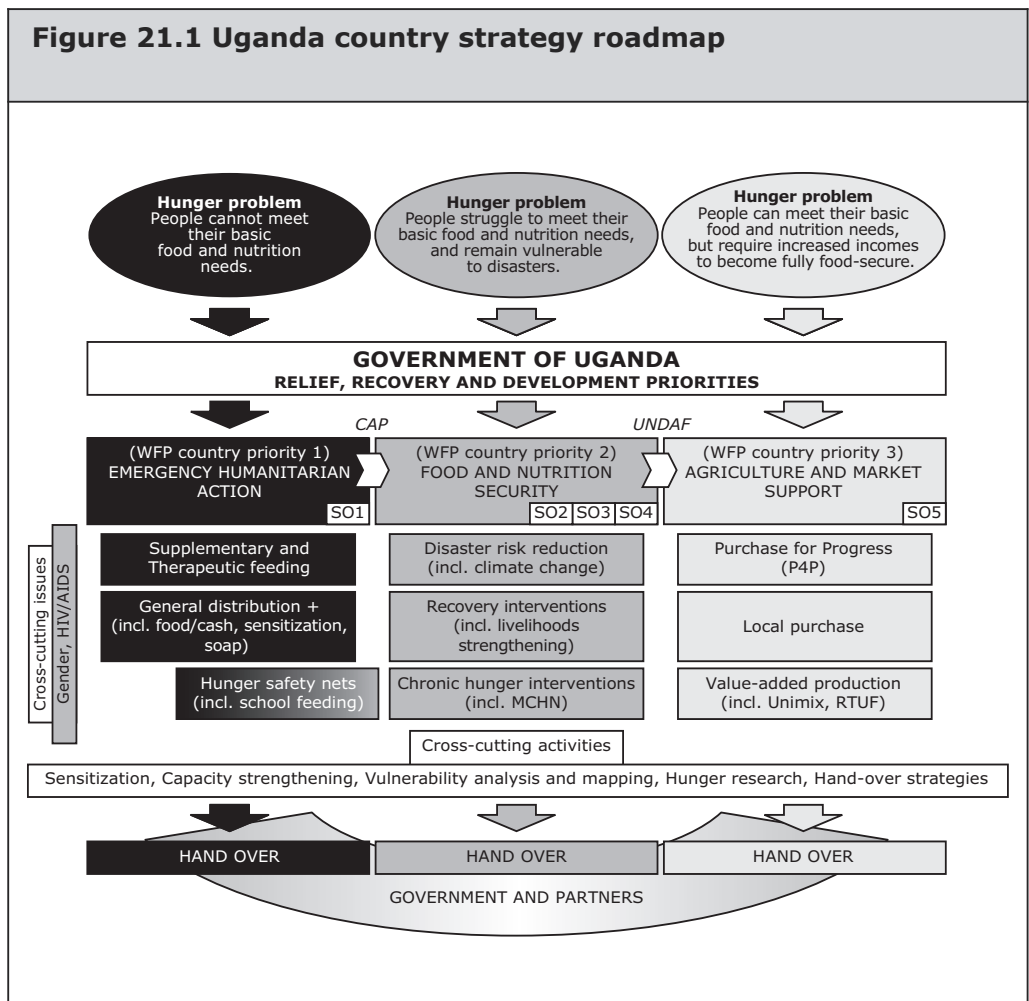
### **2.2 Aligning WFP's activities in the country with the new WFP Strategic Plan**

For WFP Uganda and other country offices, the WFP Strategic Plan 2008–2011 meant shifting from a focus on how best to deliver food aid, towards a focus on providing hunger solutions – including food aid and other direct food transfers, but not limited to these. The Strategic Plan emphasizes the importance of effective emergency response, while underlining the need for WFP to focus on prevention, including disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change. It highlights the importance of effective recovery efforts as well as WFP's core role in helping to address chronic hunger and its root causes.

The WFP Strategic Plan 2008–2011 acknowledges governments' primary role in addressing hunger issues, and the importance of WFP in supporting and reinforcing that role. Strategic Objective (SO) 5 not only prioritizes capacity strengthening of governments, country authorities and institutions, but also links WFP's efforts to broader national development plans, goals and efforts. Because the Strategic Plan has also expanded the range of tools at WFP's disposal, country offices such as Uganda are empowered to offer a different range, type and set of hunger solutions. Conceptually, the approach of the new Strategic Plan requires deeper analysis of the causes and potential solutions to hunger problems in any

given context. Achieving the plan’s objectives also implies greater strategic and policy alignment and a more proactive approach to governments and partners than was necessary in the past.

Although the Strategic Plan identifies clear objectives and opens up new possibilities for WFP country offices’ responses, the prioritization of objectives in each country context is the responsibility of the individual WFP country office. WFP Uganda therefore had to determine which of the corporate SOs fit with the particular challenges and circumstances in Uganda, and what level of priority each should be given. Government’s views were of fundamental importance, and the perspectives of in-country donors, United Nations agencies and other development partners on the ground had also to be taken into account (Figure 21.1).



### **2.3 Repositioning WFP as a major development actor in Uganda**

WFP's mandate from the United Nations General Assembly is both humanitarian and developmental. In Uganda, as elsewhere, the balance of WFP's efforts during the past decade have been heavily weighted towards the humanitarian side, as the organization worked to help Uganda deal with the consequences of internal conflict in the north and insecurity and recurrent droughts in the northeast. Between 2005 and 2007, humanitarian relief operations accounted for more than 90 percent of WFP assistance in Uganda, but with the subsequent cessation of hostilities in the north and the gradual return of displaced persons to their homes, Uganda faced – and continues to face – an enormous challenge to ensure recovery, reconstruction and sustainable development.

The challenge for WFP Uganda was to shift its activities and approach to respond to the changing situation and the new focus on recovery and sustainable development. The new WFP Strategic Plan provides a framework and some additional tools for achieving this, but the task of making WFP relevant in a changing environment is a strategic challenge for the country office and a major focus of its strategic review process.

The aim of repositioning WFP through the country strategy was to align the organization with the priorities and strategies of the Government of Uganda, identifying gaps and needs where WFP has a comparative advantage for providing solutions. There were two main challenges: (i) identifying and articulating effective WFP recovery and development responses that go beyond food aid; and (ii) in a very competitive aid environment, persuading donors and other development partners that WFP activities focused on development are worth supporting and funding. Once these issues were addressed, the country strategy could serve as a framework for WFP's move to a food assistance approach in Uganda.

### **3. Process and methodology**

Preparing the Country Strategy Document for WFP in Uganda (2009–2014) was a lengthy and dynamic process, which lasted about six months and was undertaken in three phases:

- the preparatory phase;
- the decision phase;
- the consultation phase.

### 3.1 The preparatory phase

During the preparatory phase, a team of three to four people prepared a comprehensive background document on the development situation in Uganda. This document was divided into four sections, covering:

- an overview and analysis of hunger in Uganda;
- the policy context and a summary of existing government development strategies, including a chapter on region-specific strategies;
- the state of current development/humanitarian assistance to Uganda, including an analysis of WFP's current *positioning* with its partners and other development actors operating in Uganda;
- an analysis of WFP's impact in Uganda to date, looking at existing programmes through the lens of the new corporate SOs.

The purpose of the background document was to set parameters for the discussion, generate new lines of thinking through a critical analysis of ongoing activities, and reflect on what WFP's new strategic direction might mean in Uganda.

The document is about 50 pages long and took about two to three weeks to prepare. It is for internal use only, and includes numerous quotations and excerpts from official documents.

### 3.2 The decision phase

During the decision phase, the country office hosted a four-day meeting attended by all senior WFP staff, including the heads of all sub-offices and country office units. Prior to the meeting, all participants were sent a copy of the corporate Strategic Plan and the background document via e-mail.

Table 21.1 outlines the programme for the four-day meeting.

| <b>Table 21.1 Programme for the Uganda Country Office decision-making meeting</b> |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Day</b>  | <b>Areas discussed</b>   |
| 1   | <p><i>Overview of the corporate strategic plan</i></p> <p>Discussions were led by the country director. Participants were taken through each of the SOs, their related goals and how these should be interpreted. This helped staff to gain a thorough understanding of the corporate Strategic Plan, how it differs from previous plans, and the strategic implications of moving from food aid to food assistance.</p> |

**Table 21.1 Programme for the Uganda Country Office decision-making meeting (cont.)**

| Day | Areas discussed  |
|-----|--|
| 2   | <p><i>Overview of the background document</i></p> <p>Discussions were again led by the country director. Participants were taken through each section of the background document, leading staff into a common understanding of the development challenges facing the country, and the existing policy and strategic frameworks for addressing these. There was an extended discussion on WFP's impact in Uganda and WFP's comparative advantages.</p>  |
| 3   | <p><i>Setting priorities</i></p> <p><u>Morning session:</u> Discussions were facilitated by the country director. Participants discussed possible priorities for the country office, taking into account the corporate Strategic Plan, the needs and situation in Uganda, and WFP's comparative advantages in Uganda. The resulting list of potential priorities included humanitarian emergencies, HIV/AIDS, education, agriculture and market support, food and nutrition security, government capacity building, disaster preparedness, climate change and community empowerment.</p> <p><u>Afternoon session:</u> The list of potential priorities was submitted to all senior staff, who were asked to vote for the three most important ones. There was clear consensus on the three selected, which became the country office's priorities.</p> |
| 4   | <p><i>Drafting</i></p> <p><u>Morning session:</u> Drawing on the background paper and the senior staff discussion, the drafting group from the country director's office prepared a "zero draft" of the country strategy, nine to ten pages long. In addition to the new country office strategic priorities and some proposed targets, the draft included a hunger analysis, the government policy context and strategic framework, WFP's comparative advantages, and three proposed goals for each priority.</p> <p><u>Afternoon session:</u> The country director, supported by the drafting group, presented the document in plenary, for preliminary reactions. Discussion focused on framing the goals and targets under the three priority areas.</p>   |

### 3.3 The consultation phase

During the consultation phase, the zero draft was shared with multiple actors. The purpose of this was to achieve consensus on the strategic framework that would drive WFP programming in the country over the coming years.

The first round of consultations was conducted internally. The document was circulated to all senior staff, including heads of sub-offices – who were tasked with organizing meetings with their own staff at which to present the

document, explain the process being undertaken and solicit comments to be forwarded to the drafting team. Senior staff then reconvened in Kampala for two days to discuss the feedback and inputs from the field and make further adjustments to the text. This was critical in creating a sense of *ownership* and *understanding* of the document within the country office and sub-offices.

The second round of consultations involved colleagues from the regional bureau and Headquarters in Rome. The country director circulated the draft strategy to the deputy executive directors, the regional and deputy regional directors, and division directors in Rome. This was critical in ensuring that it reflected the corporate strategy and took into account the regional context.

The third round of consultations was conducted with the Government of Uganda. The country director had informal discussions with main government counterparts about the general approach and direction, but did not circulate a text.

The fourth round of consultations was conducted with donors. The country director and the head of programme held bilateral discussions with ambassadors and senior staff from donor and potential donor countries. The document was circulated by e-mail, and a meeting was organized later so that the country office could receive donors' collective feedback and comments, mostly at the programme officer level. This was critical in ensuring donor understanding and buy-in for the process, the approach and the conclusions.

The fifth round of consultations was conducted with partner United Nations agencies. The country director and head of programme had bilateral discussions with United Nations agency representatives and their senior staff. The document was again circulated by e-mail to all the relevant agencies, and a meeting was organized with United Nations representatives so the country office could receive their collective feedback and comments. This was critical in ensuring that the document was in line with the broader United Nations direction and the work being conducted by other partners.

The final round of discussions and consultations was again with the Government of Uganda. This time, the country director had formal bilateral discussions with ministers and government counterparts, at which the strategy and the proposed priorities, goals and targets were discussed. The document was circulated by e-mail to all the relevant ministries, and the country office received their collective feedback and comments at a meeting with senior officials. This was critical in ensuring that the document was correctly aligned to government policies, plans, strategies and priorities.

Bilateral briefings and discussions on the draft country strategy were held with WFP's principal non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, in Kampala by the country director and head of programme, and in the field by the heads of sub-offices.

A final draft – officially the third draft – incorporating feedback and comments received throughout the consultation phase was circulated to all actors. This draft was then sent to the Strategic Review Committee at Rome Headquarters for final discussion and approval.

## **4. Implications for the programme portfolio**

To implement the new direction outlined in the country strategy, WFP Uganda needed to realign its programme portfolio. The process of translating the country strategy into a new set of activities on the ground involved a series of linked steps: preparing new project documents; designing sub-office roadmaps; altering annual work plans; and setting new outputs for individual staff members (Figure 21.2).

### **4.1 New project documents**

The first step in this process was the preparation of a new set of project documents for approval by WFP’s Executive Board in Rome. Although this required a significant investment of time, it also provided two important opportunities for innovation: first, it allowed WFP Uganda to help reshape the standard project categories; and second, it provided a chance to outline a model for activities that reflected the new corporate strategic direction.

#### ***Reshaping project categories***

In October 2008, WFP Uganda had two basic project documents that served as the approved frameworks for its activities: a protracted relief and recovery operation (PRRO), and a country programme. The PRRO covered a range of interventions from emergency responses, such as general food distributions, to recovery activities, such as food for work and school meals, in drought-affected Karamoja, conflict-affected Acholi, and the refugee-hosting west. The country programme focused on development-oriented activities, such as school meals and mother-and-child health and nutrition (MCHN) in Karamoja, and local purchases in surplus-producing parts of the country.

In many ways, these documents were typical of those found in WFP offices around the world. The PRRO had been criticized because, like many others in WFP, it brought together a variety of different activities under a single project. This type of document was sometimes disparagingly referred to as a “super PRRO”. For donors, the fundamental problem with a super PRRO is that they cannot be sure how their contributions would be spent, as the PRRO document covers such a wide range of activities. Unless a contribution is earmarked, the funds might be used for recovery activities that are not consistent with the strictly humanitarian intent of a donor’s allocation. While smaller and not as closely scrutinized, the



country programme overlapped with the PRRO in terms of both activities, such as school meals and food for work, and geographic focus, such as Karamoja, creating confusion about the differences between the two programme categories.

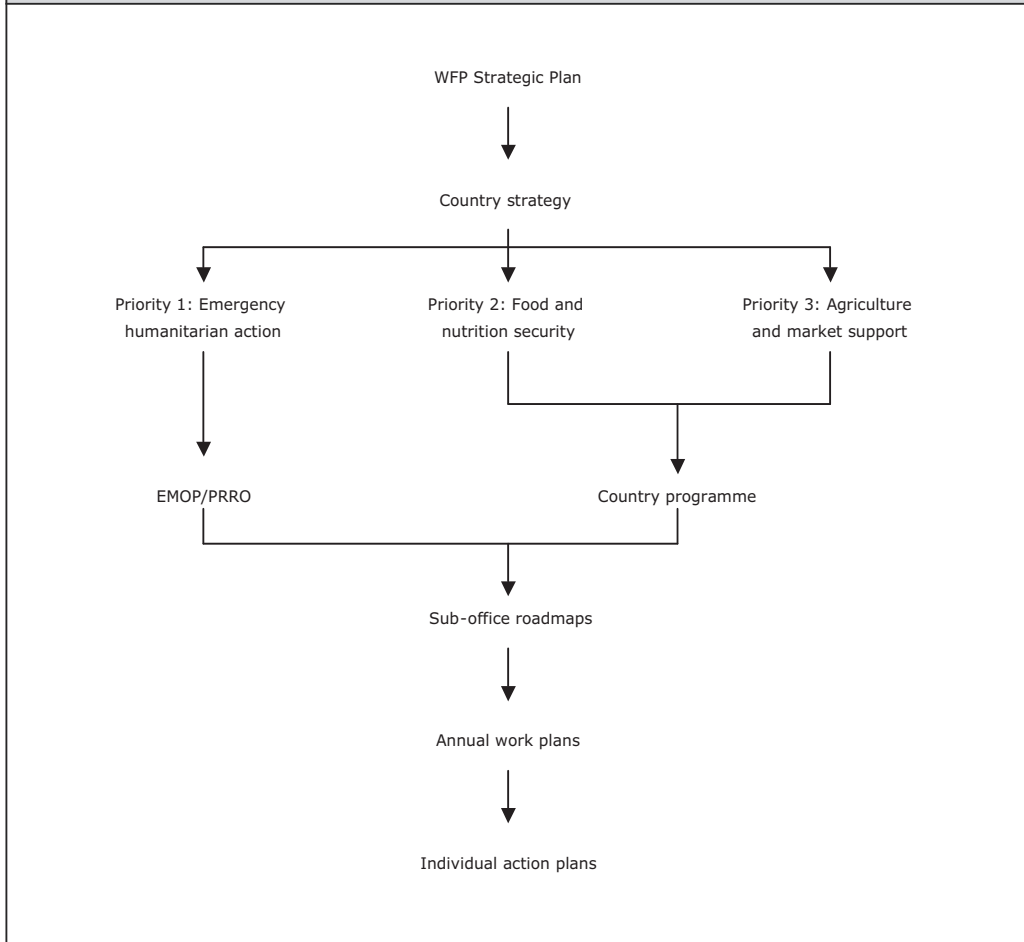
The country strategy therefore presented an opportunity for reshaping and restoring clarity to the programme categories in line with the new corporate direction. Under this approach, the country office's priority 1 – emergency humanitarian action – was translated into an emergency operation (EMOP) and a new PRRO. Both operations focus exclusively on *humanitarian* responses, thus addressing concerns about the ambiguity of purpose in the super PRROs. The EMOP and PRRO categories are designated for distinct situations. EMOPs are to be used for one-off crises such as droughts and floods that threaten food security for a limited period. In Uganda, this category is being used for the humanitarian response to the drought in Karamoja. The PRRO category is to be used for more protracted crises that require assistance over a prolonged period, such as interventions to support refugees and internally displaced persons in Uganda.

Country office priorities 2 and 3 – food and nutrition security, and agriculture and market support – are both covered by a new, expanded country programme, which incorporates *all* recovery and development activities, creating a clear demarcation from the humanitarian focus of EMOPs and PRROs. This re-categorization has had far-reaching implications. It is now viewed as a model throughout WFP, and a committee has been established at WFP Headquarters to ensure that future PRROs follow a similar approach and division of labour.

### ***Developing models for new activities***

Taken together, the priority areas identified in the country strategy form a continuum of food security. At one end, emergency humanitarian action supports people who need assistance to survive. In the middle, food and nutrition security is directed at those who are no longer at risk of dying but who are still struggling to meet their nutritional needs. At the other end, agriculture and market support focuses on smallholders who are able to meet their needs and produce some marketable surplus. The priority areas thus deal with different types of hunger problem, and the project documents need to lay out appropriate solutions for each.

In the EMOP and PRRO, WFP Uganda focuses on a clear nutritional objective for emergency humanitarian action: to stabilize or reduce global acute malnutrition rates. In keeping with the approach of using appropriate tools to address hunger in specific contexts, the country office took as its starting point the conceptual framework for malnutrition and analysed the immediate causes of hunger in each locality. Recognizing from the assessment data that inadequate dietary intake and disease contribute to high acute malnutrition rates, the

**Figure 21.2 Uganda country strategy implementation process**

responses were designed to address both of these immediate causes.

Regarding dietary intake, the focus is on not only the quantity but also the quality of the food. Corn-soya blend has been added to the emergency ration – an innovation that allows general distributions to have a greater impact on acute malnutrition levels. Cash, combined with nutrition messages, is planned for areas where markets are functioning. To help address disease, the country office has introduced soap into the ration, as a way of improving hygiene and sanitation. Recognizing that general distributions provide an opportunity for reaching a large number of people, WFP plans to work with partners to communicate messages on disease and other relevant topics through drama, dance and visual aids. In this way, WFP can leverage its contact with the

communities and assist other United Nations agencies and NGO partners in reaching them with critical messages.

Addressing priorities 2 and 3, the country programme proposes ways of supporting government efforts to address the medium- and longer-term causes of hunger. Under food and nutrition security, the focus is on three issues: disaster risk reduction; recovery, which involves strengthening and diversifying livelihoods; and addressing chronic hunger.

This third component illustrates particularly well the new problem-based approach. Stunting rates, which are used to measure chronic hunger, are at their highest in two very different parts of Uganda: the semi-arid, drought-prone Karamoja region in the northeast; and the green, wet southwest region in the opposite corner. However, the causes differ: people in Karamoja have difficulty with access to enough food; while those in the southwest have trouble selecting the right kinds of food. In response to these differing causes, the interventions also vary: food is an integral part of the MCHN and school meals activities in Karamoja; while sensitization campaigns using dance, radio, posters and local champions form the centrepiece of efforts in the southwest.

The goal of agriculture and market support is to link smallholders to markets so that they are able to sell their surpluses, improve their incomes and thereby move towards greater food security. The strategy used builds on WFP's already extensive programme of local procurement in Uganda. In the past three years, the country office has bought in-country more than US\$50 million-worth of maize and beans for WFP activities in Uganda and the region. WFP's purchases therefore account for a very significant proportion of the demand for quality maize and beans in the country, which puts WFP Uganda into a good position for stimulating production from the demand side.

On the supply side, the country programme identifies two links in the value chain that need particular strengthening: post-harvest handling, and market infrastructure. Post-harvest losses in Uganda are among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa, reaching 40 percent for some commodities. The country programme indicates that WFP will work with groups of smallholder farmers to improve their techniques and thus increase the amount that is available for consumption and marketing. However, the markets also face serious constraints regarding infrastructure. Working with the Uganda Commodity Exchange, WFP Uganda plans to help establish a series of warehouses equipped with cleaning, drying and grading equipment, which will enable smallholder groups to store their surpluses, meet East African quality standards and reach large buyers such as WFP through the warehouse receipt system. Together, the interventions on the supply and demand sides should stimulate the rapid development of a more competitive, open market, to the benefit of smallholders.

## 4.2 Sub-office roadmaps

Once approved by the Executive Board, the project documents provided a new framework for WFP's activities in Uganda. It was then necessary to translate the broad brushstrokes of the project documents into concrete plans at the sub-office level. WFP Uganda has 13 sub-offices across the country. This geographic coverage is a distinct comparative advantage for implementing projects in line with district goals and plans. The next step in the process was therefore the development of sub-office roadmaps – an innovation for WFP in Uganda.

Consistent with the timeframe of the country strategy, the sub-office roadmaps outline a five-year plan for achieving the outcomes contained in the project documents. Bringing together all sub-office staff, one-day focus sessions were held at each sub-office to identify where WFP wants to go, where it is now, and how to get from where it is today to where it wants to be.

The first part of the day focused on a visioning exercise, creating a common view of how the areas served by the sub-office would look in five years time if the outcomes of the project documents were achieved. The second part involved a mapping exercise to review the *current* situation. Staff discussed the food security indicators and physically mapped the existing activities of government, WFP and partners. From this, the group identified gaps in programming that would hinder its ability to achieve the vision.

The third and final part of the day was completion of the roadmap. After reviewing a set of programming principles, such as geographic focus, thematic focus, impact, sustainability and equity over time, the sub-office staff mapped out locations for activities, showing how they would combine over the five years to achieve the vision. The results were documented and discussed with local government as a proposal for WFP's support to the district plans.

## 4.3 Annual work plans

As the sub-office roadmaps outlined the focus over a five-year period, the next step was to elaborate the specific activities that would be carried out during the following year. Based on the roadmaps, sub-offices prepared short implementation plans for their proposed activities. These plans outlined the basic hunger problem, the proposed hunger solutions, the implementation modality, such as cash and/or food, the partners involved and main areas of concern. A budget, activity calendar and procurement plan were included as annexes.

The implementation plans were consolidated into binders and presented at an annual work plan meeting, where heads of sub-offices presented their proposed plans and costs to their peers and senior management. Based on the presentations, the budget overviews and the resources that were likely to be

raised, the country director selected plans for approval. This selection formed the basis of the annual work plan for sub-offices and the central office in Kampala.

#### **4.4 Individual action plans**

The agreed work plans and their outputs and outcomes were the starting point for developing individual action plans for each staff member – whether in administration, programme or logistics. Working with a supervisor, each staff member was set output targets. At mid-year and the year end, progress against the indicators is reviewed and coaching on performance given.

This process helped to ensure a clear translation of the corporate strategy into individual-level action plans. Each individual staff member's activities support the annual work plan, which in turn is aligned with the sub-office roadmap. The roadmaps are designed to achieve the aims laid out in the project documents, which are based on the priority areas identified in the country strategy. The country strategy itself reflects the new corporate direction. In this way, all the activities of individual staff members systematically align with and implement the new corporate Strategic Plan, helping WFP to make the shift from food aid to food assistance.

### **5. Major challenges and factors for success**

Although introduction of the country strategy and the shift in programme activities have been largely successful in Uganda, the country office faced several serious challenges. The first is that the process took time. It took almost a year and a half to move from preparatory work on the country strategy through the approval of new project documents to the development of individual action plans. There was a risk that the country office would lose morale and focus during this process. However, because the shift in direction was signalled early, through identification of the country strategy's priority areas, the office had a clear direction, which staff and partners could understand and support during this period of transition.

The second challenge related to staff capacity. The new activities required a different set of skills – strategic planning at the outset and then technical programming. Rather than terminating staff who lack the appropriate background, the country office has focused on staff development, setting aside funds to support the training and skills development of core staff members. Where required, the country office has recruited people with the required skills to join WFP.

WFP's existing rules and procedures posed a third challenge. They too had to be redesigned to reflect the historic shift set out in the corporate Strategic

Plan. WFP Uganda's efforts posed several questions: Could WFP really achieve nutrition-related outcomes? Was it possible for WFP to purchase warehouses and cleaning, drying and grading equipment? Could WFP receive and report contributions that were not tied to a rate per tonne of food? How would budget formats need to be adjusted? Working closely with the regional bureau and Headquarters, answers have been found to these and other, unforeseen issues.

Despite these difficulties, the Government of Uganda, partners and donors have widely praised and supported the new approach. The following are key factors that contributed to this success:

- *Alignment with government strategy:* From the outset, it was emphasized that the priorities and direction of the country strategy needed to support the government's strategy, otherwise the approach would not be sustainable. Because of efforts in this area, the government has strongly backed WFP's strategy, which has given donors and other partners confidence in the new direction.
- *Systematic process for implementation:* Each step in the process was carefully managed to ensure that it aligned with the country strategy. By following a logical process, staff and partners could understand the changes and feel confident that they reflected the fundamentally new approach for WFP.
- *Wide and regular consultations:* Perhaps the most important factor for the success in Uganda was the wide and regular consultations at every major step in the process. However, this does not mean that the country office determined its new direction solely through consultative meetings. Instead, at significant moments – such as the development of the country strategy and the sub-office roadmaps – WFP first discussed the issues internally. These internal processes resulted in a clear, thought-out approach that could then be discussed and modified by government and partners.

The Uganda country office was also fortunate in having strong leadership and supportive partners in the government and donor agencies. However, each of the factors for success is replicable and could assist other country offices – and WFP more broadly – in transitioning from a food aid to a food assistance organization.

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<sup>1</sup> The Strategic Plan was subsequently extended to 2013 by the Executive Board.