South Sudan Corporate Response
February 2012 — December 2012
LESSONS LEARNED EXERCISE

Lessons from WFP Personnel and Partners
Executive Summary
March 2013
Figure 1. The Republic of South Sudan accessibility during the wet season
Foreword

In 2011, the Republic of South Sudan celebrated independence, becoming the world’s newest state. It was also one of the world’s least developed countries with some of the lowest socio-economic indicators in the world.

For the World Food Programme (WFP), the Republic of South Sudan remains one of our most complex operating environments with poor roads and infrastructure, low agricultural production, and widespread poverty and hunger. Moreover, it has a rainy season that makes 60 per cent of the country inaccessible for eight months of the year.

In February 2012, WFP decided that the situation in the Republic of South Sudan warranted the declaration of a corporate response in order to mobilize the resources of the entire organization in support of the newest country to join the United Nations. Factors involved in this decision included: (i) the challenges regarding food security faced by the new government that was ill-equipped to respond; (ii) the transition period of the Juba office to a fully-fledged – and fully staffed – country office; (iii) the need to pre-position sufficient stocks before the looming rainy season; (iv) insecurity; and (v) the need to respond to the needs of the influx of returnees to the Republic of South Sudan from the Republic of the Sudan, as well as refugees from clashes along the border.

The corporate response remained in place until December 2012, after which the Director of Emergencies commissioned this Lessons Learned Exercise.

This is the fifth corporate Lessons Learned Exercise that has been commissioned by the Emergency Preparedness Division, in line with WFP standard practice of documenting and learning important lessons following every new major emergency. It acknowledges and supplements the findings of previous Lessons Learned Exercises, and contributes to the body of knowledge that fuels the corporate spirit of learning.

Ultimately, during the period of this corporate response, WFP brought assistance to more than 2.7 million people who were relying on WFP for their existence. This document, which is not an evaluation but a listening and learning exercise, outlines some of the successes and challenges
encountered by staff during the corporate response. By acting collectively upon its recommendations, we continue to learn from our experiences and turn WFP into an ever stronger, more responsive organization.

Ertharin Cousin

Executive Director
World Food Programme
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Executive Summary

Background to the Corporate Response

A. Context of the Lessons Learned Exercise

1. On 8 February 2012, the WFP Executive Director declared a Level 3 corporate response to respond effectively to the situation in the world’s newest country, the Republic of South Sudan. Decades of conflict, low levels of development and civil war had left this country with some of the worst socio-economic conditions in the world and a population at risk of food insecurity.

2. At the time of the declaration, the WFP office in Juba was scaling up to become a fully-fledged WFP country office. Moreover, for 2.7 million beneficiaries it needed to resource, procure and, more importantly, pre-position eight months of requirements in remote warehouse locations throughout rural areas of the country before the onset of the wet season that begins in April.


4. In line with the WFP practice of conducting Lessons Learned Exercises following a corporate response, the WFP Emergency Preparedness Division commissioned a Lessons Learned Exercise for the Republic of South Sudan in March 2013.

5. A four-person team drawn from staff in the Emergency Preparedness Division carried out the Lessons Learned Exercise and conducted interviews in Headquarters, in the country office in Juba, as well as at the regional bureau in Nairobi, Kenya. Some staff who had been called forward on temporary duty assignment and who were no longer in the Republic of South Sudan were contacted by e-mail and/or telephone.

6. This report sets out the findings of the Lessons Learned Team. This is the fifth Lessons Learned Exercise commissioned by the Director of Emergencies and the first to take place at the same time as a WFP audit. As with previous Lessons Learned Exercises, the detailed
recommendations will be entered into the Emergency Preparedness Division lessons learned database to monitor trends, allow for in-depth search, prioritization and tracking of recommendations and, where appropriate, feed into the activities and institutional strengthening focus of the Preparedness and Response Enhancement Programme.

7. During the course of the Lessons Learned Exercise, four main themes emerged that could be translated into direct actions that will contribute to improving WFP’s corporate response capacity and improve systems for those who implement future corporate responses.

### WFP Lessons Learned Exercises Methodology

WFP Lessons Learned Exercises are designed as “listening and learning” exercises intended to identify key successes and challenges.

The standard methodology for WFP Lessons Learned Exercises includes four activities:

- **Desk review** — covering WFP documentation (project documents: SitReps, mission reports, press releases, task force NFTRs, etc.); past Lessons Learned Exercises; some external documents prepared by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) were reviewed for a sense of WFP’s place in the wider humanitarian arena.

- **Written feedback** — a Lessons Learned Exercise template was circulated to task force members and field staff by e-mail and posted on EPweb.

- **One-on-one interviews** with senior managers and key staff.

- **Focus group discussions** were held with task force members and field staff in Juba and Nairobi.
B. The Situation in the Republic of South Sudan in February 2012

(i) The Political and Economic Situation

8. In the months following independence on 9 July 2011, and leading up to the declaration of the corporate response by WFP, the situation in the newly independent country was fluid and, at times, precarious with the new Government facing a complex array of political, economic, humanitarian and security challenges.

9. One of the most important factors influencing the overall economic situation was that the oil pipeline was shut down in February 2012. This had a serious impact on the new Government, as oil production accounts for 98 percent of the entire budget revenue and 82 percent of the gross domestic product.\(^1\) Despite the fact that 75 percent of the active oil fields are located in the Republic of South Sudan, almost the entire oil infrastructure is located in the Republic of the Sudan. Following the shutdown, the Republic of South Sudan faced a monthly loss of US$650 million. At the time that WFP declared the corporate response, it was estimated that fiscal reserves would last only until October 2012 and the World Bank was warning that the country’s economy was close to collapse.\(^2\)

10. While the Government took important steps to accelerate the process of state-building, North-South clashes erupted in Abyei and the Republic of the Sudan’s Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile States. Further ethnic clashes and/or cattle raiding resulted in an influx of 350,000 returnees from the North and an increase of 120,000 internally displaced persons in Jonglei State. In addition, the increasingly tense border areas of Unity and Upper Nile forced 90,000 refugees to flee southwards.

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1  FAO-WFP Crop and Food Assessment Mission Report, February 2012.
(ii) The Humanitarian Situation

11. On the humanitarian front, the situation in early 2012 was extremely fragile. After decades of civil war that resulted in severe neglect or destruction of basic infrastructure and absence of public services, the Republic of South Sudan has some of the worst socio-economic indicators in the world. Only half of the population has access to improved sources of drinking water, infant mortality stands at 75 per 1,000 live births, and the maternal mortality rate is 2,054 per 100,000 live births.³ The benefits of oil revenue and the long-awaited peace dividends have yet to reach the majority of the population, and there are significant disparities between urban and rural areas, and between population groups.

12. A Rapid Crop Assessment conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), WFP and the Norwegian People’s Aid in August 2011 indicated an overall cereal deficit of around 371,000 mt, which was confirmed by the FAO-WFP Crop and Food Assessment Mission Report of February 2012. The shortfall was 60 percent higher than the previous year and indicated that the food insecurity situation was likely to worsen in 2012, further contributing to a steadily deteriorating crop and food availability situation.

13. Compounding this precarious situation was the notable increase in food prices, particularly in imported sorghum and wheat flour, which doubled in comparison to 2011. There were also fuel shortages, poorly functioning markets and weak or non existent infrastructure in most areas of the country; government austerity measures included cuts in operational costs, capital expenditure, and blocked grants to states. A reported reluctance of the population in rural areas to cultivate because of insecurity and unresolved land-ownership issues also contributed to the fragile situation.

14. Other contributing factors to the overall situation included periodic flooding, outbreaks of predominantly waterborne diseases and persistent food insecurity trends, which increased the already high levels of vulnerability facing the people of the Republic of South Sudan.

³ The Government of the Republic of South Sudan 2006 and 2010 Sudan Household Health Surveys (information from EMOP 200338).
15. WFP began to consider asking the Executive Director to declare a corporate response in the last quarter of 2011. A visit to the region by the Deputy Executive Director for Operations in January 2012 further raised awareness that the country office required more resources to respond than it had in hand.

16. The most urgent task was to resource, purchase and deliver sufficient food to feed the 2.7 million beneficiaries who were relying on food aid and pre-position it before the rainy season that begins in April. As illustrated in Figure 1, approximately 60 percent of the Republic of South Sudan becomes inaccessible during the rainy season and 80 percent of WFP’s target beneficiaries live in the 60 percent of the country that is inaccessible.

17. Traditionally, WFP’s supply line for the Republic of South Sudan had come overland from Port Sudan. When the borders closed owing to the political tension between the Republic of the Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan, this was no longer an option and other corridors urgently needed to be identified and made operational. This became one of the most significant challenges of the operation, requiring a complete reorientation of the pipeline, transport and sourcing of commodities, and required the involvement of the Country Directors in neighbouring countries and the engagement of their respective logistics departments. WFP’s Forward Purchase Facility and the presence of large quantities of commodities in the region (for the Horn of Africa crisis) were used as a means to maintain the pipeline for the Republic of South Sudan.

18. During the course of this Lessons Learned Exercise, there was discussion with several colleagues as to whether the situation in the Republic of South Sudan warranted the declaration of a corporate response. It is the opinion of the Lessons Learned Team that the criteria for activating a corporate response, as outlined in the protocol, were justified and WFP acted to save lives and avoid a potential humanitarian crisis. The declaration of a corporate response ensured the release and prioritization of the necessary resources (pre-positioning, advance funding mechanisms and air-drops helped to avert an even bigger crisis) within the organization to facilitate a rapid scale-up. WFP was credited internally, but also externally, for its choice to declare a corporate response. The Government expressed appreciation for WFP’s response as it demonstrated that the Republic of South Sudan was a priority for WFP, and donors followed by almost fully funding the emergency operation (up to 89.5 percent in 2012). The context of the lessons learned during the Horn of Africa crisis, and the
respective engagement of national governments in providing political and logistical support (corridors and local purchases), should be emphasized as contributing to the overall success of the operation.

19. The Republic of South Sudan corporate response greatly benefited from the fact that the Horn of Africa corporate response was still under way, which meant: (i) that the corporate systems required to support a corporate response were already in place; and (ii) coming at the end of the Horn of Africa corporate response it benefited from the many lessons learned from that emergency.

C. The Findings of the Lessons Learned Team

20. The biggest lesson identified during the process was the impact that WFP can have when it pulls together as an organization. The discussion at the Nairobi Regional Bureau meeting in December 2011 on the need to pre-position for the rainy season prompted a response that crossed over numerous countries and mobilized resources to enable the organization to respond effectively and quickly to the needs of the people.

21. WFP has been a major player in the Republic of the Sudan for 30 years, since the collapse of the Addis Ababa Agreement in 1983, and has amassed a significant amount of knowledge and experience during this period. While the issue of corporate knowledge management goes beyond the scope of this report, it does beg the question as to how WFP can better capitalize on the wealth of knowledge and experience, through a robust corporate knowledge management system, and what impact this may have on the organization’s ability to respond effectively.

22. Declaring a corporate response in February 2012 may have prevented a humanitarian crisis and most certainly alleviated the suffering of those dependent on food assistance and provided support to a young government ill-equipped to respond to the needs of its people.

23. The Lessons Learned Team interviewed WFP staff at Headquarters, the regional bureau and the country office, as well as key partners in the Republic of South Sudan. The team adopted a listening and learning approach and, in addition to recommendations by functional area, identified four main themes that can be developed into key actions that WFP can implement that will improve the ability of WFP staff implementing
future corporate responses to respond more quickly and effectively. These key actions are:

(i) **Time-bound Increase in Delegated Authority of Country Directors**

The country office in the Republic of South Sudan reported that its ability to procure equipment and supplies for the increased programme was not sufficient and cited the fact that almost every purchase made, from computers and telephones to vehicle tyres for the fleet, exceeded the delegated authority of the Country Director. While waivers were processed quickly and efficiently, it created an additional administrative burden on the country office. Similar constraints on country offices have been noted in other Lessons Learned Exercises. Given the need for quick action to save lives in emergency situations, the concept of moving operations closer to beneficiaries as outlined in Fit for Purpose, combined with the close oversight corporate responses receive, it is recommended that the delegated authority of Country Directors be increased to that of the Regional Director.

**Recommended action**

The Director of Emergencies should coordinate with the relevant departments and prepare a submission to the Executive Management Group for authorization to amend the Activation Protocol, automatically increasing the delegated authority of Country Directors from US$200,000 to US$1 million for the duration of the corporate response.

(ii) **Introducing a Programme Capacity Assessment in WFP Regular Operations**

Programme implementation faced a number of challenges, especially in the initial stages of the corporate response. The Lessons Learned Team heard from a number of sources that it took a long time to be able to provide reliable information on requirements and locations for assistance, which, in turn, delayed the ability of the Logistics Unit to call forward the food or implement the non-food components. There were difficulties in identifying appropriate cooperating partners, and the implementation of the cash and voucher programme was extremely problematic and slow.
Colleagues working on the development of this programme category reported that it took time for them to find cooperating partners, identify reliable distribution mechanisms for vouchers and outlets able to support vouchers and, generally, gather sufficient information and resources for proper planning and implementation.

**Recommended action**

WFP should explore the possibility of developing a Programme Capacity Assessment (PCA), similar to that produced by Logistics, which would be updated on a regular basis. The PCA would bring together into one formal document much of the information already available but dispersed throughout both the Programme Unit and the country office. This information could include, but not be limited to, information on non governmental organizations operating in the country and their expertise, government counterparts and existing support infrastructure, known population movement patterns (if appropriate), availability of merchants and/or shops for cash and voucher programmes, a seasonality calendar and an assessment calendar.

**(iii) Alternate Arrangements for Vehicle Call Forward during Corporate Responses**

At the beginning of the Republic of South Sudan corporate response, the country office did not have sufficient vehicles for the increase in requirements, and this was reported to have had a negative impact on the operation. WFP security reported that the United Nations Department of Safety and Security imposed a convoy restriction of two vehicles on many locations, which meant that some WFP missions were unable to take place because the vehicles were not available. Moreover, many were not Minimum Operating Security Standards (MOSS) compliant.

While the option for borrowing vehicles from neighbouring operations can be explored, this is not always a viable option, as most country offices do not have a surplus of quality vehicles that can be released without impacting their own operations.

The Global Vehicle Leasing Programme (GVLP) in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, confirms that it is almost impossible to have vehicles available within an absolute minimum of six weeks. The availability of vehicles is a
common theme running through Lessons Learned Exercises, both at Levels 2 and 3. In particular, the Sahel Lessons Learned report states that “Obtaining vehicles through the GVLP took between 3 and 7 months (Chad)”.

**Recommended action**

A thorough review of the GVLP business model and an exploration of other actions are required. The Resource Management and Accountability Department has advised that it will be looking into this issue as part of the business process review. It is recommended that the following options be considered as part of such review:

(I) Establishing a stock of MOSS-compliant vehicles that can be located at United Nations Humanitarian Response Depots and available for dispatch by air in support of a Level 2 or Level 3 emergency within 24-48 hours; or

(II) Automatically grant Country Directors and/or Regional Directors the authority to purchase vehicles from other sources other than GVLP and arrange them to be MOSS compliant.

**(iv) Implementation of an Emergency Roster**

A common theme running through interviews involved the availability and deployment of staff. At all levels of the organization, staff emphasized the need for an emergency roster whereby the right staff is available, with the right experience, and at the right time. The need for the organization to rethink staffing in emergency situations is a thread that runs consistently through all five Lessons Learned Exercises, and includes references to staff with the wrong profile being deployed, too many staff being deployed, of staff deploying without consultation, of managers’ reluctance to release staff, to the same staff being deployed over and over again, to the need for staff with local knowledge to deploy. A lack of suitable training and/or simulations such as the now defunct WFP emergency response training or

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4 WFP Lessons Learned Exercise, the Sahel, 2012.
the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees emergency training is also a common theme.

**Recommended action**

While the Lessons Learned Team recognizes that a Preparedness and Response Enhancement Programme-Human Resources Working Group has developed a comprehensive emergency preparedness and response training and deployment strategy to address this issue, and an Executive Director Circular outlining the corporate emergency response roster has been issued, Human Resources and the Emergency Preparedness Division should jointly expedite implementation of the corporate emergency response roster. It is further recommended that the Director of Emergencies and the Human Resources Director seek the support of the Executive Management Group to accelerate the process of securing adequate and sustainable funding for the maintenance of the emergency response roster and related training programmes to ensure their continuity.
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- **Bertrand Tessier**: inside back cover
  (Yida, the Republic of South Sudan).
FAO-WFP Crop and Food Assessment Mission Report, February 2012.


The Government of the Republic of South Sudan 2006 and 2010 Sudan Household Health Surveys (information from EMOP 200338).

WFP Lessons Learned Exercise, the Sahel, 2012.

WFP/EB.1/2005/5-B; definition of special operations.