Foreword

In December 2012, when WFP declared the emergency operation in the Syrian Arab Republic a Level 3 Corporate Emergency, it was targeting some 1.5 million people inside that country for assistance.

Since then, WFP’s Syria corporate response has continued to unfold within the context of an unprecedented global humanitarian crisis demanding an extraordinary response to meet the needs of those affected. WFP rose to the challenge and, by November 2014, had scaled up operations to reach over four million beneficiaries in Syria alone and another 1.8 million displaced people in neighbouring countries.

Given the highly volatile environment in which WFP operates, this is a remarkable achievement. WFP staff are to be commended. They managed, and continue to do so, access constraints and faced particularly difficult security and safety conditions, at times placing themselves at great personal risk to reach those affected by the conflict.

Early on in the crisis, WFP was able to establish cross-border and cross-line operations in Syria, as well as provide logistics support to the humanitarian community. New approaches had to be developed to ensure that WFP food reached the intended beneficiaries such as an Integrated Supply Chain Management and a Crisis E-Voucher programme.

The Syria conflict and its challenges persist today. WFP and its humanitarian partners continue to explore the best means of responding to the growing needs of affected people. At the time of writing, an innovative, integrated global social media campaign had just been launched to mitigate a funding shortfall that threatened the delivery of WFP assistance to the Syrian beneficiaries.

Nonetheless, in the course of every emergency we discover that we still have lessons to learn; the Syria Crisis response is no exception.

We must continually strive to identify ever-more suitable and effective ways to deliver assistance to people in need. Listening, learning and analysing are critical processes to help us do just that. This seventh corporate Lessons Learned Exercise, commissioned by the Emergency Preparedness Division, is the first of its kind conducted while an emergency response is ongoing. It represents a first step towards real-time corporate learning from those directly involved. By acting collectively upon this report’s recommendations, WFP commits to building on its successes, and becoming an ever stronger, more responsive organization.

Ertharin Cousin

Executive Director, World Food Programme
# Acronyms

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<td>Assistant Executive Director</td>
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<td>CALL</td>
<td>Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning</td>
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<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-Based Organizations</td>
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<td>CD</td>
<td>Country Director</td>
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<td>Director of Emergencies</td>
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<td>GoS</td>
<td>Government of Syria</td>
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<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<td>L3</td>
<td>Level 3 Corporate Emergency</td>
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<td>Lessons Learned Exercise</td>
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<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<td>Regional Bureau</td>
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<td>REC</td>
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<td>Regional Refugee Response Plan</td>
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<td>L3 Syria Crisis Corporate Response</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Executive Summary

CONTEXT OF THE LESSONS LEARNED EXERCISE

1. On 14 December 2012 WFP’s Executive Director declared a Level 3 Corporate Emergency (L3) to step up WFP’s response to the rapidly escalating events in the Syrian Arab Republic. These events had led hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes and had left millions of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

2. At the time of the declaration, WFP targeted 1.5 million displaced and other vulnerable people inside Syria, and 400,000 who had fled to neighbouring countries. Over time, it became apparent that the number within Syria alone could increase to 4 million. For 2014 WFP planned to reach 4.45 million people in Syria, and 2.7 million refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey per month.

3. The L3 Syria Crisis Corporate Response (SCCR) was the first under the revised Activation Protocol and was initially declared for three months. Since then it has been extended eight times. At the time of this Lessons Learned Exercise (LLE) the SCCR was set to be deactivated on 31 January 2015.

4. In July 2014 the Assistant Executive Director (AED)/Corporate Response Director (CRD) launched an LLE, commissioned by the Director of Emergencies (DoE) in consultation with the Regional Emergency Coordinator (REC). Thus, this LLE focuses predominantly on the period just prior to the declaration of the L3 up until the end of July 2014. Normally LLEs are undertaken after the deactivation of an L3; but, given the protracted nature of the SCCR L3, the REC and DoE felt the need to draw lessons from the ongoing operation. Taking stock at this stage would benefit not only the current operation but also future L3s, which would gain useful insights from the lessons and best practices identified.

5. A five-person team, consisting of three staff members of the Emergency Preparedness Division and two external consultants, carried out the LLE. Team members undertook a thorough desk review of over 80 documents.
They also conducted eight focus group discussions and more than 50 one-on-one interviews in Headquarters, the Regional Emergency Coordinator’s (REC) Office in Jordan and the Emergency Coordinator’s (EC) Office in Lebanon. Telephone interviews were carried out with the RB, COs and ECs in the region. Interviewees included staff currently involved in the response, as well as some who were deployed in earlier phases of the emergency.

6. This report sets out the findings of the Lessons Learned Team and is the seventh corporate response LLE. It is the first to take place while an L3 activation is still in place.

THE SITUATION IN SYRIA AND THE REGION

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SITUATION

7. The conflict between forces loyal to the Syrian Ba’ath Party government and those seeking to oust it began on 15 March 2011. By April 2011, the situation had begun to deteriorate. Demonstrations, demanding the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, turned violent when the Government of Syria (GoS) began to brutally crack down on protesters.

8. The protests continued, and in the spring and summer of 2012 violence reached new heights as the conflict militarized. Heavy clashes ensued between the Free Syrian Army (FSA) — a loosely organized group of military defectors — and GoS forces. In August 2013, chemical weapons were used just outside the Syrian Capital, Damascus. In a parallel conflict, fighting raged between Kurdish armed militia and Al-Qaeda-linked groups for control of the strategic and oil-rich north.

9. By June 2014, according to UN estimates more than 150,000 people had died in the clashes.² At the time of writing, the number of civilian deaths and injuries continues to rise. Increased fragmentation of and fighting

1 As of July 31st 2014.

between opposition factions has further exacerbated the violence. Over the last three years, millions of civilians have become internally displaced, many of them repeatedly as conflict has engulfed different areas. Many others have fled abroad, the vast majority finding refuge in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. More than 100,000 refugees continue to be registered each month, bringing the current number of Syrians registered by UNHCR to some 2.8 million people.

THE HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

10. Since the crisis began, there has been an urgent need for humanitarian assistance due to multiple cycles of displacement, pressures on basic social services and decreased access to food. The most acute humanitarian needs are concentrated mainly within active crisis zones and areas of large-scale displacement within Syria, as well as at final destination/receiving areas in neighbouring countries.

11. The humanitarian impact, however, is much broader. In Syria, an estimated 10.8 million people are in need, 6.4 million of whom are considered internally displaced persons (IDPs). In the early months of 2014, there were:

- continued disruptions of social services;
- deepening economic fragility in the labour market and most economic sectors, leading to increased poverty;
- drought conditions in parts of Syria that impacted food production and the overall food security situation; and
- continued violence and protection concerns.

For the 2014 funding period the requested funding for the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Plan (SHARP) stood at US$2.27 billion.

12. A number of challenges continue to affect the smooth and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance in Syria. Among these are:

- the frequent deterioration of the security situation in many parts of the country;
Executive Summary

- access constraints, which restrict the conduct of assessments and field monitoring;

- unpredictable and often ad hoc governmental procedures, including requirements for clearances for all deliveries in the field; and

- restrictions imposed on international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) related to approval of staff deployments.

13. Outside Syria, the governments of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have extended exceptional hospitality in granting Syrians access to territory and protection, including health care, education and security. Per the 2014 Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP), the humanitarian community has collectively:

- provided more than 1.7 million people with food assistance;

- facilitated more than 1 million health consultations;

- helped 350,000 children to enrol in school; and

- provided more than 1 million refugees with the means to meet their basic needs through either in-kind or cash assistance contributions.3

Currently, the planning figure in the RRP stands at 3.59 million people by the end of 2014.

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THE FINDINGS OF THE LESSONS LEARNED TEAM

14. The following findings are drawn from various primary and secondary sources. Reflecting WFP’s corporate response Lessons Learned methodology, in line with the ongoing internal evaluation of the SCCR, and aligned with the inter-agency Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning (CALL), this report and its recommendations seek to highlight the successes, best practices, challenges and areas for further refinement in the SCCR, as well as for future (L3) emergency operations.

MAJOR EMERGING THEMES

15. Overall, the findings of the exercise continuously point to five major themes that permeate all aspects of the corporate response.4

i) The novel model of management and corporate structure

The Syrian and sub-regional response was brought together under a single empowered Regional Emergency Coordinator’s (REC) office based in Amman, Jordan. This novel structure was found useful in supporting the emergency operation in Syria and in facilitating strategic coordination across the five affected countries. Particularly important was its proximity to the operation and its full dedication to the sub-regional response. Being based in Amman helped facilitate regional inter-agency coordination with most of the operational agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO) because they have regional offices there. The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator and the Regional Refugee Coordinator were hosted there, too.

Some respondents, however, felt that the creation of a structure in parallel with the Regional Bureau dissociated WFP’s pre-existing in-country leadership and the Regional Bureau from the operation. It was highlighted that this has implications for their current functioning, as well as potential implications for a smooth transitioning of emergency support back into the RB/COs when the REC office and the L3 are deactivated.

4 These will be further elaborated on in paragraphs to follow.
Recommended action: Regional Emergency Coordinator’s office and parallel structures

When, in future, a REC office is created in parallel with the Regional Bureau, the organizational structure, the responsibilities of the REC office and each entity within its orbit, and the reporting and information-sharing lines with and between RB, HQ and affected COs should be elaborated in a detailed protocol at the time of L3 declaration and the establishment of the REC office. The system developed for this operation by the REC office and the relevant COs should be seen as model for such protocols and as good practice.

ii) The integrated approach to supply chain management

With regard to HQ support, the functioning of the Supply Chain Working Group (SCWG) was particularly appreciated across the board as a very effective and efficient tool for upstream supply chain management. Respondents recommended that this mechanism be institutionalized, with clear elaboration of functions and roles of the functional units involved. Given the success of this integrated approach, it was suggested that WFP should examine other functional areas where individual units could be integrated to handle large-scale emergencies.

Recommended action: integrated supply chain management

Strengthen the institutionalization of this integrated approach by:

a) identifying additional functional areas where such integrated functioning would enhance efficiency; and

b) formalizing membership, internal responsibilities and roles of the Supply Chain Working Group and any additional integrated entity.

iii) The novel approach to risk management and increased risk appetite

The complexity and magnitude of the crisis — in addition to the large reputational risk in non-delivery — also called for new, forward-leaning
approaches to reaching beneficiaries. The report highlights the exceptional calculated risk appetite shown at both field- and REC office-level in the areas of programme modalities, financing, and procurement. In particular, the team found the scaled-up implementation of the e-voucher modality to be good practice that should be replicated. The contextualized use of retail shops and other community-based organizations (CBOs) in both camp and non-camp settings in Jordan and Lebanon, in particular, provide an example of what can be achieved when the risks associated with innovation are properly managed. While some of these successes arose by necessity, they provide useful lessons that can be formalized and standardized into WFP’s business processes.

**Recommended action:**

**risk management and risk appetite**

In future operations, build in greater risk appetite for development and implementation of innovative activities, even when not all processes and procedures are in place.

**iv) The evolving nature of WFP’s core staff profiles**

The programme modalities utilized at field-level, as well as the new middle-income context for WFP emergency operations, consistently pointed to the need to comprehensively reassess staffing in two major ways.

First, the large-scale roll out of e-vouchers highlighted the need to augment and update ‘traditional’ functional area profiles such as Finance, Programme, IT, and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) to reflect their shifting roles in the e-card supply chain.

Second, the high political sensitivities and complex nature of the crisis showed the need for altogether new functional support such as political risk analysis and mitigation, as well as security forecasting.

The operations in Syria and neighbouring countries epitomize WFP’s core shift from ‘food aid to food assistance’. But they also bring to bear the structural implications and deficiencies of this shift in relation to staff deployment, core competencies, and cross-functional (or ‘hybrid’) staff profiles, as well as the need for WFP to be more proactive and competitive in the way it recruits, manages and retains its staff.
Recommended action: updating WFP’s core staff profiles

Identify newly emerging staffing profiles that WFP requires in order to optimally prepare and implement its response to complex emergencies in a changed socio-economic, political and security scenario.

Design a strategy to access the services of experts in these areas and to strengthen existing WFP staffing profiles with basic elements of those new areas.

v) The pressing need for a proactive corporate knowledge management culture

The team noted that some of the findings and recommendations from previous L3 LLEs concerning key areas such as deployment, handover, and delineation of roles and responsibilities were still valid for the Syria LLE, this seventh corporate LLE. This points at a strong need for a proactive and formal knowledge management architecture at both field and HQ levels.

The need to have a better system to manage best practices and ensure that lessons are indeed learned and acted upon is not supported by an appropriate structure or corporate culture at WFP. WFP continually ‘re-invents the wheel’ or encounters challenges with previously identified solutions, particularly in emergency responses.

This finding gains more value given the major themes highlighted above, and points to the fact that there is a pressing need to mainstream knowledge management and implement best practices/LL-capturing mechanisms in WFP’s business processes.

Recommended action: corporate knowledge management

Design a system in which functional units bear formal responsibility for the implementation of LLE recommendations pertaining to their area of responsibility. Constitute future LLE teams with staff from those units so as to increase coherence in LLE approaches and following through on areas for improvement.
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- **Abeer Etefa**: front cover
  Kawargosk camp, near Erbil, Iraq, August 2013.

- **Marco Frattini**: inside front cover and page 2
  Food vouchers, Alexandria, Egypt, April 2013, and
  Kawargosk camp, near Erbil, Iraq, August 2013.

- **Hani Al Homsh**: page 11
  Inter-agency convoy led by WFP, Aleppo, Syria, May 2014.

- **Dina El Kassaby**: inside back cover
  Distribution of Specialized Nutritious Foods, Rural Damascus,
  December 2013.

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