



World Food Programme

WFP News

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The Newsletter of the World Food Programme in West Africa

« The crisis is not over »: Interview with Thomas Yanga, Regional Director



WFP/J. Schuler

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Following high food prices, cheap local food stalls became very popular among students

West Africa had a lot to deal with last year, is the High Food Prices crisis over?

The harvest has been good in the region, the result of good rains but also of government efforts. However, our market analysis has shown that until January 2009, local cereal prices in the region are higher than at the same time in 2008. The negative impact of high prices continues to be a major challenge for vulnerable people in the region.

We also have to get prepared for an additional burden on the shoulders of the poor: the effects of the global financial crisis. Many countries in the region are affected from decreasing remittances from nationals living abroad as well as the decreasing revenues from export crops produced by small farmers.

Between December 2007 and December 2008, the palm oil price dropped by 49 percent, cotton by 16 percent and rubber by 50 percent. Some 16 million people are directly or indirectly benefiting from cotton production in the region.

To address the impact of high food prices, the long term solution is to significantly increase the level of food production and to put in place social protection mechanisms. In the meantime, as a short term measure, WFP has scaled up its nutrition and safety net programmes and initiated new programmes such as the Food and Voucher Programme in Burkina Faso and the promotion of fortified food for small children in Senegal. In addition, WFP will help small farmers to connect to markets

through the new P4P pilot project.

What are the biggest challenges on top of this crisis?

On top of high food prices and the financial crisis, chronic malnutrition has to be tackled aggressively and we have to make every effort to step up our programmes together with our UN sister agencies, governments and NGO partners.

We have to focus in particular on post-conflict and transition countries. It is important to maintain the attention and the support to these countries, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Guinea, where the reality on the ground shows that in order to consolidate peace and stability, there is a great need of continued commitment, especially for combined relief and recovery interventions.



UNMIL/Ch. Herwig
WFP School Canteen in Liberia

Could you give an example of a programme you visited in the region?

My visit to a school benefiting from the school feeding programme in urban Monrovia is an image that I always have in mind. WFP supplies a warm meal to school kids every day and when I visited the school I noticed that many children would keep a little bit of their portion of rice and beans to bring back home for their



WFP/S. Savanoud

Thomas Yanga, Regional Director

brothers and sisters who do not have the chance to receive a good meal during the day.

What are the biggest funding gaps for WFP in West Africa?

WFP urgently requires additional resources, particularly for the operations in Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Niger and Côte d'Ivoire. To cover the operational costs for the coming eight months, Burkina Faso needs US\$6.6 million, Sierra Leone US\$ 12.6 million, Niger US\$14.5 million and Côte d'Ivoire US\$17.7 million.

The United Nations Air Service Operations in West Africa (UNHAS) urgently needs US\$29.4 million.

Contributions are particularly urgent for UNHAS in Niger, West Africa Coastal (Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire) and Central African Republic. Without this funding the air operations will have to close down which will seriously hamper an efficient and safe humanitarian infrastructure to put at the service of those in need.

Special logistic Operations in Central African Republic and in Chad (infrastructure and logistics coordination) also need US\$8.4 million.

WFP restarts food convoys through the Libyan Corridor



WFP/W. VanRooy



The food convoy across the desert

The World Food Programme recently resumed convoys from Libya across the Sahara desert to bring food to more than 250,000 Sudanese refugees in Chad. "The resumption of the Libyan corridor operation is a race against the clock. We have five months to deliver food aid to the refugee camps in Eastern Chad before the rainy season blocks the roads," said Mamadou Mbaye, WFP Country Director in Chad. WFP thanks the governments of both Libya and Chad for ensuring the safe passage of these convoys through 2,800 kilometres of Sahara desert from Al Khufra, WFP's logistics hub in the south of Libya, to the Touloum, Oure Cassoni and Iridimi refugee camps in

eastern Chad as well as Libya's invaluable support for the provision of much-needed food to refugees in Eastern Chad.

"Bringing food into the country is a race against the clock, everything has to be in place before the rainy season blocks the roads"

Since August 2004, Libya has been providing this crucial transport corridor from the port of Benghazi through the Sahara to Chad. This ensures that WFP can proceed with regular food distributions and pre-position food stocks in eastern Chad's refugee camps before the rains start in July.

A first convoy of 58 trucks left

Al Khufra at the end of December and arrived in Bahai on 17 January. A second of nearly 100 trucks departed on 11 January for the challenging journey across the largest desert in the world. They have now reached the eastern camps. Two more convoys are expected to merge at the Libya-Chad border soon.

In Chad, WFP provides food for 250,000 Sudanese refugees, 180,000 internally displaced Chadians, 150,000 local people affected by the refugee crisis as well as 57,000 refugees from the Central Africa Republic. In addition, 215,000 Chadians in the food-deficit Sahelian zone also receive WFP food assistance.

It all starts with VAM—WFP's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping

The analysis of changing eating habits, income and expenses as well as coping strategies of poor families are essential to understand the impact of the high food prices on their vulnerability.

After each disaster and before starting any new programme, WFP has to determine who is affected, and to what degree and how the food security conditions have changed compared to the pre-crisis situation. This is the role of WFP's Vulnerability Analysis Mapping unit (VAM) which generally conducts studies in partnership with governments, FAO, UNICEF, research centres/institutes, and NGOs.

In 2008, during the high food price crisis, it was essential to act rapidly. WFP assessed the impact of high food prices on households in several countries in West Africa: Benin, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Niger and Senegal. The assessments revealed an increase in urban vulnerability, which contrary to WFP tradition, prompted a new focus on city populations. The analysis of changing eating habits, income and expenses, as well as the coping strategies of poor families are essential in understanding the impact of high food prices on their vulnerability. These studies included an analysis of food market trends to better understand the relationship between higher prices and household food security.

The results of these assess-

ments were crucial for the development and implementation of new programmes for all people thrown into the hunger trap because of high food prices. Assessment results revealed that in rural Senegal, their own food production only covered five months of food consumption in 2008, leaving households dependent on other sources, including the market, to bridge the gap. In Liberia's capital Monrovia, households reduced consumption of eggs, meat, fruit, fish and beans between December 2006 and June 2008. In the interval, the consumption of greens and starches increased, reflecting a decline in the quality of the diet. In many cases, including Liberia, the assessments served as basis for discussions with governments over high food price

interventions.

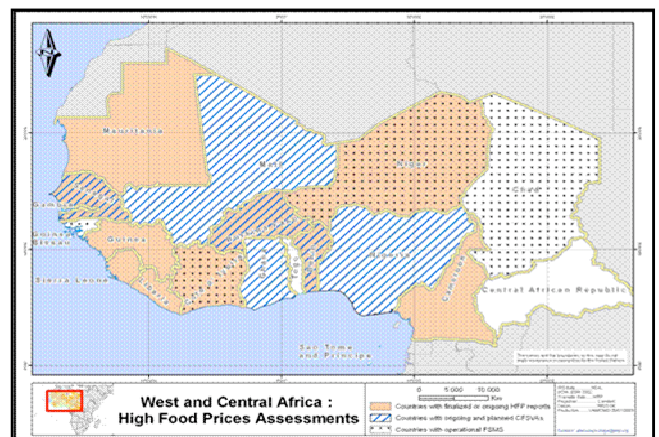
Besides emergency assessments, WFP conducted regular Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis assessments (CSFVA) in 2008 in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali and Cameroon.

In 2009, VAM faces many new challenges; a priority is the support to and evaluation of programmes newly put in place following the high food price crises. In addition, last year's crisis provoked many new questions which need to be studied closely, such as why food prices remain high in West Africa, given decreasing prices on international markets, and how the financial and economic crisis could affect food security.



WFP/L. Tahirou

Group discussion in a rural village in Niger



Senegal: WFP fights high malnutrition in the Matam region

"My little girl changed so much since I received the first food ration one month ago. She is finally becoming lively again", said Coumba Ba, a thirty-year-old mother in Lougre Thioly, a very remote, dry region in Eastern Senegal. Coumba had just received the second ration of fortified blended wheat for her malnourished girl. "Since my child started having diarrhoea some months ago, she became weaker and weaker and lost a lot of weight. I didn't know what to do and brought her to this health centre where they treated and admitted her into the supplementary feeding programme", Coumba added.

Coumba's family, who lives in a little hut surrounded by dust, eats millet on a daily basis. It is rare that her husband, a herder, visits the weekly market 60 km away, particularly since the food prices started increasing after a bad harvest in 2007. The family is often forced to skip a meal or when things are seri-

ously difficult, when there is really nothing left to eat, they sell a goat. Sending their four children to school is not possible right now. Their eldest son has to help his father and for the others there is just no money to buy what is needed to attend classes. In addition, the family of nomads is frequently on the move.

In the Matam region, close to the Malian border, **malnutrition** is a major challenge. According to a joint WFP, UNICEF, Ministry of Health nutritional assessment, the global acute malnutrition rate in the region is 18 percent, well above the emergency level of 15 percent. It is even higher in remote areas. The causes are multiple: the **scarce availability of health services** and particularly the **limited access to clean drinking water**. There are a few wells but their pumps work for a only couple of hours a day. For the rest of the time, the water lies besides the wells, where animals drink it before the

women take some home for their children and other household purposes. In the areas without wells, the population uses swampwater for all purposes. In addition, the local diet **has little variety**, and **illiteracy rates are very high**.

WFP collaborates with the NGO Counterpart, which manages the supplementary feeding programmes for moderately malnourished children in 58 nutrition centres in the Matam region. Once a month, mothers bring their children to the nutrition centre for a medical check. The physical development of each child is observed and mothers receive a ration of fortified blended food for their child. At the same time, mothers are given hygiene training, and instructed how best to prepare the food. The programme for 4600 children started in September 2008. The intervention is part of WFP's response to high food prices in Senegal.



WFP/J. Schuler
Coumba Ba in front of the health centre in Lougre Thioly

"We are often forced to skip a meal or in the worst case, when there is really nothing left to eat, we sell a goat."

Burkina Faso: Voucher programmes for the poorest in the cities

On the outskirts of Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, Sylvie Dipama finishes her day's work. Three more days and she should be able to sell a cartful of sand for 750 Francs CFA Francs (about US\$1.5). Her previous job was selling cooked rice on the streets, but the price of rice became so high last year that she could not make a cent out of it anymore.

"It has become extremely difficult. I have four children but I had to leave our youngest daughter with my mother temporarily as we really can't afford to feed everybody at home", says Sylvie, shielding her face from the sand as she sifts it.

For dinner that evening: a small

pot of beans, sorghum with a bit of salt which will feed five people in the family and two cousins.

"We have really seen this situation again and again over the last year," explains Annalisa Conte, WFP country director in Burkina Faso. "Even in the informal sector, people could not earn a living anymore because of high food prices and had to resort to other activities."

Despite a relatively good harvest in 2008, cereal prices remain very high in the country (millet is up 22 percent on last year, sorghum 21 percent). A joint assessment of UN agencies, NGOs and the government last June indicated that the combination of high food prices

and a decrease in employment had a negative impact on people in urban areas, as they generally rely on cash to buy food on the markets.

To help people to recover from these shocks, WFP and NGOs in the country are about to start voucher distribution programmes in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso for 30,000 families. These vouchers will allow people to purchase locally-produced goods - corn, oil, sugar, salt and soap - from local shops.

This is the first time that WFP has launched distribution programmes in urban areas in West Africa in order to improve the health and nutritional status of the poorest.



WFP/S. Savariaud
Sylvie Dipama sifting sand to sell it afterwards

"I had to leave our youngest daughter with my mother temporarily as we really can't afford to feed everybody at home"

Cereal Banks: Support to the rural poor in Niger, Mauritania and Cameroon



Women managed Cereal Bank in Niger

“Women now make a major contribution to the family budget. Before, men were responsible to cover all the costs.”



The women in the village developed their own monitoring system for the food stock

Surrounded by a group of women in the centre of a small dusty village, Aissa Seyni opens the doors of the cereal bank as early as eight o'clock, as she has been doing since 2006 during the period before harvest. The village women of all ages, members of the cereal bank, quickly line up to borrow their share of cereals which they will have to reimburse at low interest rates after the harvest. In Tondigamèye, only 40 km away from Niger's capital Niamey, but hard to access down a narrow, sandy road, the WFP-initiated cereal bank is exclusively managed by women.

“The cereal bank in our village has changed my life”, says Aissa Issaka, a 50-year-old widow who waits her turn. “When I don't know anymore how to feed my seven children, I now have the possibility to borrow cereals from the bank and reimburse them after the harvest. In previous years I had to travel to the capital to ask for help from cousins,” she said. Aissa Seyni, who was chosen to be part of the management committee, is very pleased: “The availability of cereals in our village compensates me more than enough for my daily work, even though I am not paid. In addition, I was able to learn many new skills during the trainings organized for the whole management committee.”

Like the majority of women in Todigamèye, Aissa Seyni is illiterate. CARE International, WFP's partner in establishing

cereal banks in several regions in Niger, also organizes training for the management committees and helped the women develop their own monitoring system. Instead of letters and words, they use symbols to follow the development of the stock on a daily basis. A circle with three dots, for example means 250.

The men in the village were very hesitant before the opening of the cereal bank. However, once they realized the contribution women made to the village and to their family, they changed their opinion. “The surrounding villages are very jealous, even though they benefit from our bank. Before it was started, everyone had to travel to Niamey to buy cereals and they were even more expensive”, said Boubacar Djibo, the chief of the village. Aissa Seyni added: “Women now make a major contribution to the family budget. Before, men were responsible to cover all the costs and now we do it together. This helps us for additional expenses such as medical costs for the children. I even realize that my husband now asks my advice before taking a decision and other women are capable of providing for their family when their husbands are absent.”

In West and Central Africa, WFP supports Cereal Bank projects in Niger, Cameroon and Mauritania. The main objectives of cereal banks are to improve the food security of rural communities by making low-cost food available to its

members, to empower local women, to stabilize cereal prices in the villages and to protect small farmers from speculation.

In **Niger**, WFP has supported cereal banks for more than 20 years. In 2008, almost 2 million vulnerable people in rural areas benefited from 4000 WFP Cereal Banks.

In **Mauritania**, since 2005, WFP has set up almost 3,500 cereal banks (known locally as Village Food Stocks) across the country. In addition to making low-cost food available to its members, WFP contributes to the income of local farmers and food producers by buying their cereals to replenish the banks. During the spike in food prices in 2008, the village food stocks provided a low-cost alternative to almost 200,000 vulnerable villagers.

In **Cameroon**, the cereal bank activity, called cereal granaries, was launched in the Extreme North province of Cameroon during the last drought which affected the area at the end of the 1990s. By the end of 2007, 300 cereal village granaries had been supported by WFP in the Extreme-North and North provinces. The granaries were managed mostly by women's groups. With the support of the EU Delegate of Cameroon, 350 additional cereal granaries are under construction in the three regions of Extreme-North, North and Adamaoua. The project will benefit more than a million additional people.

Local Purchases: New technical handbook and guidelines



Since 1999, WFP has been implementing a local food procurement policy - buying cereals in surplus areas, to be distributed in the deficit areas. When possible, buying locally considerably reduces the commodity and transport costs, as well as the delivery time.

Making sure that local suppliers are well informed about WFP's procedures and requirements is essential. To help them deliver good quality products in a timely manner, the Regional Procurement Office has just published **food suppliers' guidelines** as well as a

technical handbook.

The handbooks have been printed thanks to Swedish and French funding. They are available at WFP's Procurement Office in Burkina Faso.

Cape Verde: WFP hands over school canteens by 2010

In 2010, after thirty years of collaboration, WFP will hand over the school feeding programme to the government of Cape Verde. The hand-over is the result of significant improvement in the country's social and economic indicators and the government's commitment to maintain the school feeding programme. The indicators are currently the highest in the sub-region and the enrolment rate at primary schools is at 92 percent.

"A transition strategy is in place to ensure that the school feeding programme continues under national leadership," explained Petra Lantz, the Representative of the United Nations System in Cape Verde. "There was so much progress; WFP and the Government will ensure a smooth transition," she added.

The transition strategy includes a number of steps to be taken before the School Feeding Programme is taken

over by the government in 2010. Capacity building activities are key, but the strategy also includes planning, as well as monitoring and evaluation elements. The handover of logistic activities focuses on two areas: port operations and the management of imports as well as the supervision of storage facilities. WFP has already provided technical assistance to the government.

WFP uses two indicators to confirm the necessity of its presence in a country: the average GNP per capita over a three-year period needs to be equal to or lower than US\$900 per year, and the chronic malnutrition rate of children below five years of age needs to be 25 percent or above. In Cape Verde, the average GDP per capita is US\$2,650 and the chronic malnutrition rate of children under five is 16 percent.

As early as 1995, WFP and the government decided on a partial handover of about 30

percent of the urban school canteens to the government. But seven years later, following a decrease in the school enrolment rate, WFP again assumed funding for the entire project. After the hand-over in 2010, it is hoped that another downturn in the school enrolment rates can be avoided, although the current global economic downturn is an additional challenge for a country which is very dependent on remittances.

Given the progress which has been made, the government considers the continuation of the school feeding programme a national priority. "School canteens are to education what education is to development", said Finance Minister Cristina Duarte.

Currently, about 100,000 primary and pre-school children in Cape Verde receive a daily meal thanks to the school canteen project which started in 1979.



WFP/A. Pinto

WFP food from a Spanish contribution in a school in Cape Verde

There was so much progress; WFP and the Government will ensure a smooth continuation of the school feeding programme

Cameroon: Students thank Executive Director for school canteens

"WFP School Feeding has improved the lives of so many young people in my country, Cameroon", wrote Devawissa Zourmba (18) in a letter to WFP's Executive Director, Josette Sheeran last September. Even though Devawissa has never benefited from WFP assistance himself, he was very touched when his friend Rekdai Noel told him about the free lunches they received every day at school at the Government School in Bourha.

According to Noel, rice and stew attracted children to the school in an area where maize, millet and sweet potatoes are the main staple food. Some children even sought to be transferred to GS Bourha because of the free meals. The food especially helped poor children who had to walk four to five kilometres to and from

school.

In the name of all the children in Cameroon, Devawissa wanted to thank WFP's Executive Director for its assistance to Cameroon and Africa as a whole, as he understands very well that the school feeding programme has contributed a great deal to the promotion of education in Cameroon's rural areas and to the fight against illiteracy.

The Government School in Bourha was one of the schools benefiting from the programme. As the school became very large, it stopped receiving WFP assistance in 2002. WFP is in favour of promoting school attendance in smaller neighbouring schools. This is very much regretted by the Head Teacher, Kodji Teri Deli who says that pupils per-

formed better in end-of-term examinations in the days when they were able to use WFP's food to give the children a meal every day.

The World Food Programme, in collaboration with the Government of Cameroon, has in the past three decades given food assistance to primary schools in the Adamaoua, North and Far North Regions, considered as priority education zones in the country. The daily meals consist of cereals, oil, beans and salt, distributed to pupils of selected schools. The programme is today active in 258 government primary schools in the three regions. A total of 55,000 children are currently receiving daily meals and 7,000 girls receive take-home rations when they attend at least 80 percent of their classes.



WFP/Ousmane Mankou

Noel and Devawissa in the seminary

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WFP Regional Office for West Africa:

The Regional Office for West Africa based in Dakar oversees 19 Country Offices including the Central African Republic and Chad.

It provides strategic guidance, training as well as support in various areas: programme, logistics, resource mobilisation, public information, human resources and ICT.

The Regional Office also has a coordination role with UN sister agencies as well as humanitarian partners and donors.

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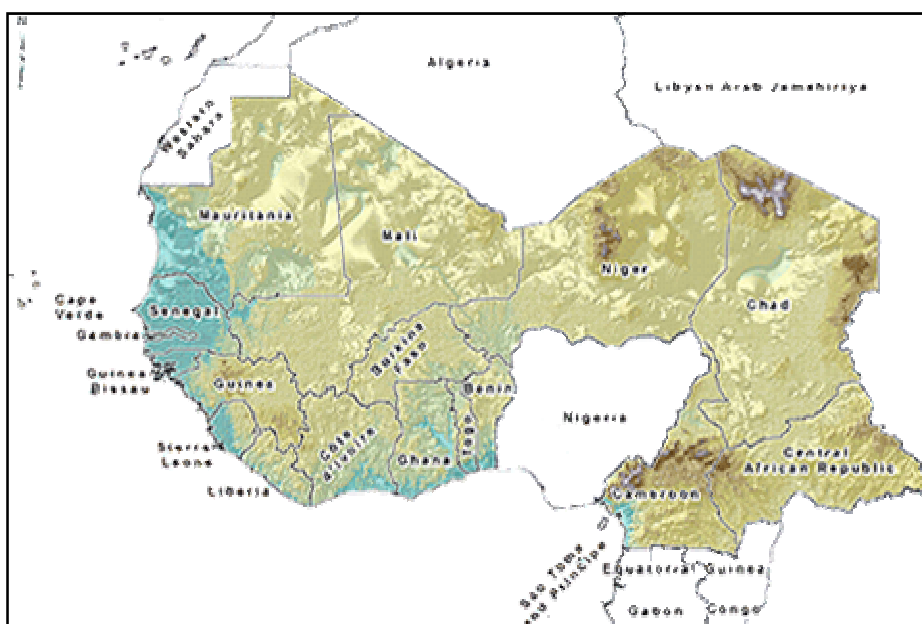
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