

**COMPLEX EMERGENCIES, PEACEKEEPING
AND THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME**

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ABSTRACT

The World Food Programme's (WFP) largest mission has evolved in the last decade from development to disaster relief. Particularly the rise of emergency food aid delivered in response to civil disorders has presented new challenges. This has led to substantial organizational changes. Coordination with UN and NGO humanitarian agencies has grown, logistical capacity has adapted to difficult requirements, and strategies to work in an insecure environment have been developed. The reliance on emergency relief makes WFP operations, and funding, more dependent on unpredictable political events. Thanks to this evolution and the variability of emergency needs, WFP's future direction and role in the UN system remain important issues.²

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The demand for UN intervention to provide emergency feeding to refugees and displaced persons fleeing domestic wars in the 1990s has substantially altered the World Food Programme (WFP). WFP's modal mission has evolved from development to disaster relief. In 1977, 19% of its food aid commitments were for emergencies. Over three-quarters of this food was targeted to respond to physical calamities such as droughts. Twenty years later, in 1997, 85% of WFP commitments went to emergency operations. Furthermore, three-quarters of these resources were committed in response to 'man-made' disasters.¹

WFP was perhaps the most affected of UN agencies as a result of the growth of emergency responses. Growth in emergency operations also changed WFP far more than it changed the organization of bilateral food aid providers such as the US government or the European Union, or NGOs such as World Vision or CARE. Thus, while world-wide food aid donations shifted toward humanitarian response, this shift was far less pronounced among bilateral donors. Global food aid flows for emergency relief moved from 15% in the 1970s to 30% in the mid-90s, doubling the share; for WFP the resource shift was nearer four-fold.

This essay reviews the dramatic shift in WFP orientation toward emergency feeding, particularly in 'complex emergencies' in which political, military and humanitarian missions are undertaken. It considers the effects of this shift on the WFP as an organization and on the efficient use of food aid for recipients. The transformation of WFP from a development organization toward a humanitarian response agency, while still ongoing, has already had substantial consequences for its operations. It has entailed a greater attention to shorter-term, more costly interventions. There has been an attendant reduction in capacity-building collaborations with developing countries. More poor countries that are relatively stable get fewer resources. Uses of food aid for targeted, sustainable hunger reduction projects have been curtailed. In this regard, while WFP operates in ways that are similar to other parts of the UN system, the special nature of food aid as a less fungible resource than cash, and one more conventionally linked to immediate relief, makes the changes in WFP more pronounced.

Two external factors in particular have driven WFP away from its original mandate. First, WFP's mission has been heavily affected by shrinking global aid contributions. Since 1992 cash and food for regular WFP programs stopped growing. As a consequence de-earmarking of funds for development projects already committed was necessitated, and projects in the pipeline were set aside. Cash reserves of the Programme became nearly exhausted. Coinciding with this tightening of regular resources, a second factor, the growing demands that WFP launch humanitarian responses for people devastated by a rise in anarchical strife, was accompanied by increased resources provided for this purpose. Thus WFP was drawn toward an enhanced role as a crisis response agency. By bringing food to rescue people fleeing conflict, the agency not only serves the human rights objective of a right not to starve, but also desirably plays a supportive part in UN peacekeeping.

Background

Since its establishment in 1963, the World Food Programme has been the United Nations' principal arm to provide food aid. Three broad stages of development have occurred in the agency's work. The first, 1963-1975, was marked by growth and consolidation around the use of food aid for development projects. The second, culminating in the 1980s, entailed increased autonomy of WFP and sharpened dedication to development objectives. Since the late 1980s a third stage has occurred. WFP has moved deeper into providing food in emergencies, principally ones where civil conflict creates refugees and exacerbates famine.

The founding vision of WFP was shaped by American and Canadian internationalists. Food surpluses, used in the 1950s as bi-lateral food aid, were seen as a valuable additional resource for UN work. Moreover, it was believed, multilateral management of food aid could avoid political and economic priorities that prevailed in bilateral allocations. Indeed, the UN context could encourage the design of 'model projects' in which food aid would be used to have a maximum impact on long-term well-being.²

Begun as a small, experimental effort under the joint oversight of the UN in New York and the FAO in Rome, WFP during the 1960s and 70s made steady advances in size and diversity with regular growth in pledged resources. While some food aid for emergencies was provided, these tended to be ad hoc instances, often linked to shortages experienced in countries with existing longer-term development projects. The World Food Conference of 1974 marked a critical juncture in WFP's history. Its governance and mandate were overhauled. Its inter-governmental steering committee was replaced by a broader-gauged parliament -- the Committee on Food Aid,

Policies and Programmes (CFA). The CFA's mandate included global policy leadership for the use of all food aid. During the early 1970s when surpluses first disappeared, surplus disposal of food, once a major fear because of its potential for trade distortions, became a peripheral concern for multilateral diplomacy. Donor funding became less linked to agricultural ministry budgeting recommendations and oversight. Food aid for sustainable development became the central objective for most governments.

This situation launched the second era WFPs history. After 1975 the organization's voluntary contributions continued to grow; by the 1980s WFP had become the largest UN agency in resource transfers; its assistance was second only to that of the World Bank among multilateral bodies. Its portfolio of projects likewise expanded. These ranged widely in size and purpose. Thus its pledged food and cash resources supported projects that aided general development such as road building and repair as well as specific efforts to alleviate hunger, such as targeted feeding in health clinics.

With WFP's growth by the 1980s, stakeholders from rich and poor countries alike expected expanded impacts from its work. The WFP was called upon, through delegates' statements at CFA meetings, to increase its development functions. In particular, many donors offered support for projects that used food to create long-term assets -- roads, irrigation ditches, grain storage capabilities. It was also asked to expand efforts to fight hunger through newer types of development projects and/or quicker responses to rescuing countries faced with emergencies. One group of donors, largely small ones led by the Nordic group, were skeptical of development uses of food aid. They preferred that emergency relief be the central aim for food aid, saving people from famine and destitution. At the same time both external and internal critics wanted WFP to do its work more effectively, recasting its operations in the light of criticism that arose in the 1960s and 1970s that food aid created disincentives and constituted a 'moral hazard' for policy making.³ To meet these demands WFP sought and won greater autonomy from the FAO. A series of legal and political battles within the UN system in the 1980s gave WFP by 1991 independence in staff management, accounting and mission priority. By the end of this second historical period, under James Ingram as Executive Director, WFP increased not only its autonomy, but also sharpened its development portfolio through increased project and policy analysis. Food recipients were distinguished from project beneficiaries; local purchase of food was emphasized where possible. The latter was a measure justified more to assist income and food system stability in a recipient country or region than to lower transaction costs. In addition, throughout the period WFP enhanced its logistical capacity to deliver food, taking on broad management

of moving food from donors to inland points of end use in recipient countries. 'Monetization' (selling food in the recipient's local market) became a common practice, at least to cover local costs of inland transport, storage and handling (ITSH). The central theme of this second WFP stage was to target food aid to food insecure populations in ways that achieved a sustainable reduction of hunger. Emergency food aid, more controlled by the FAO, was consciously limited, at least until the mid-1980s food crises in sub-Saharan Africa.

In emergencies, delivery of food has substantial additional costs. The overhead costs and increased logistic outlays were not easily covered. To meet its regular administration and transport costs the WFP had set a goal for donor pledges that one-third should be in cash. The biggest donor, the U.S., never followed this guide. Cash from food importing states, such as Saudi Arabia, was a major help in the 1980s. Such cash flows diminished by the end of the 1980s. Sometimes they were replaced by food donations such as dates from Saudi Arabia (used in the Afghan emergency). In this era cash resources were also limited by a structural conflict between the major source of funding, industrialized countries, and recipient countries. The level of cash support from rich states was a major element in CFA debates since the 1970s. Poorer countries -- often grouped as the 'G-77' states -- regularly sought more resources. They felt they deserved a more fair share of the world's resources. Though food aid *per se* was not a high priority in their quest, food shortages and chronic hunger were growing world concerns and thus gaining attention.⁴ An organizational goal in this second stage, then, became the mobilization of cash resources to enable flexible and efficient projects -- both in emergency and long-term development contexts.

The third stage of WFP's evolution was foreshadowed by the Ethiopian emergency feeding operations in 1984-86. In the 1980s humanitarian disasters, while growing, were seen as a distraction from WFP's main task. WFP development staff, already directing development operations in countries suffering emergency needs, were frequently able to add to their work the oversight of emergency operations. To do this the existing administrative capacities were diverted, stocks in place quickly released, additional food for the emergency mobilized, and local management capacity was augmented by more staff and transport vehicles. With some lag additional imported volumes of food arrived to serve both the emergency feeding operation and to replenish stocks earmarked for development projects.

This pattern has changed. Since the end of the cold war, internal conflicts have drawn the UN into more difficult and expensive peace seeking efforts than it undertook in its entire previous history. The budget for peacekeeping grew six-fold between the 1989-91 era to the 1993-95 period. Into the peacekeeping missions, along

with military personnel, went social programs targeted for emergency relief. Perforce WFP operations grew alongside these peacekeeping missions.

This growth in peacekeeping and humanitarian spending occurred even as budget constraints were tightening. Central foreign affairs spending in the US and other OECD states was about to decline. The end of the cold war, together with the rise to power of neo-liberal political coalitions in donor countries that opposed welfare functions of the state undercut support for foreign assistance, including food aid. At one time food aid played a visible role in East-West political competition. Political factors shaped its allocation. The loss of this diplomatic rationale for aid occurred incrementally during the 1970s. For example, as Cuba and Vietnam became WFP recipients, interests of the foreign policy community in donor states visibly shrank. Attacks on welfare state policies in the domestic politics of donors also grew in the 1980s. This ideological shift was a second change. Less support also resulted from a third factor, the demise of strong farm lobbies and agricultural policy reform. This change became most apparent in the 1990s. Incentives to produce food surpluses that existed in US and European domestic farm programs were reduced. Preventing surpluses from eroding prices had given farmers a strong reason to support food aid. The government burden of holding surpluses added an incentive, making the budget costs of food aid less than that for cash aid for the largest donors. These three changes, working together, reduced international and domestic pressure to provide food aid. The resulting decline in food aid was reflected, with a lag, in both domestic budget allocations and international commitments by the mid-1990s.

The past roles of such economic and political elements shaping WFP resources are visible, for example, in the history of the Food Aid Convention (FAC). The FAC originated in 1967 as a mechanism to share the burden of food aid among OECD countries; it was extended in 1980 with a minimum commitment raised from 4.5 to 7.6 million tons. Over half was pledged by the US.⁵ The FAC created an international legal presumption that its signatories guaranteed a minimum annual tonnage of food aid would be provided; the WFP was a conduit of choice for many signatories. As a pivotal provider, the size of the US's FAC pledge made the WFP vulnerable when the UN made a sharp reduction in 1995. The total FAC pledge fell to 5.4 million tons as the US, Canada and Australia all downsized their pledges. Much food aid flows outside this Convention, however. The decline in total food aid proved, however, even more precipitous than the Convention's 2 million ton decline. Overall, from 1993 to 1996 global food aid deliveries shrank from 16 million to 6 million tons. Even though WFP's share of total world flows

reached an all-time high of 35%, still the tonnage WFP provided had to decline.⁶ This decline in global and WFP food aid continued in 1997-98.⁷

The only reliable rationale for food aid remaining is emergency feeding. The shift toward this role for food aid began at the time of internal wars in Ethiopia and Afghanistan. It mushroomed when a growing need to feed refugees and displaced persons arose in other countries with civil conflicts: Angola, Iraq, Liberia, Mozambique, Rwanda and Somalia. All became challenges for WFP action. In the first half of the 1990s, as development resources were tightening, the willingness of donors to provide emergency resources kept the WFP growing as an agency. In fact, donor countries and the WFP concurred that changes to make WFP more a humanitarian agency were in order. A streamlined Executive Board replaced the CFA as the governing assembly. A new formula for calculating overhead costs of emergency food aid was developed. Personnel experienced in emergencies were sent to the field with expanded authority.

As emergency feeding became a WFP priority, donors also reduced their resources provided for development efforts. The shift to emergencies should not be interpreted as diverting food aid from development, *per se*. In practice WFP stocks positioned in a country for use in a development project have been diverted to emergency use for decades. In the past such stocks were normally replaced. In fact, this has become more uncertain. Complex emergencies occur in situations where foreign aid for development work -- road-building, education, research -- is invariably disrupted and most often suspended. Unlike weather-induced, short-term emergencies, which occur in countries with low capacity to adapt to production shortfalls, complex emergencies last longer -- sometimes years. Thus development is essentially halted. In Liberia, Sudan and Somalia this has certainly been true. Emergency food aid could be seen as a way to rescue development opportunities, creating better outcomes for future development projects. This new form of emergency relief, however, is substantially different from natural disaster cases when development projects could often continue and even be used as a vehicle for emergency responses.

The real issue is whether donor resources for WFP development projects have been reduced because donors reallocated their budget outlays or because they decided to simply reduce regular food aid (or even all ODA). Andrew Natsios, for instance, argues that the large US food contributions to emergencies did not reduce development-oriented food aid. 'These funds would not have been used for sustainable development,' Natsios argues. He believes regular food aid is not as politically popular as food for emergencies.⁸ Thus the decline of all

foreign assistance in the 1990s, led by changes in the US, in fact initially had less impact on food aid than on other assistance budget categories. Since 1995, however, food aid budgeted for development, in real terms, has shrunk; within this funding, moreover, amounts earmarked as available for shifts to emergencies has increased.

UN reform mandates also had an institutional effect on WFP in this third era. Coordination of WFP within the UN system in the first two eras had been closest with the FAO; and its projects in school feeding or maternal child health centers were often joint efforts with UNESCO and WHO. System-wide reforms in the UN have long called for improved coordination mechanisms. In the 1980s this led, in particular, to increased WFP responsibility to coordinate its development efforts with UNDP leadership. More recently, certainly after 1991, WFP coordinated its growing humanitarian relief portfolio with DHA (now OCHA), UNHCR, and UNICEF. Further, as a result of the resource changes in 1992-98, as well as UN strategy to focus on least-developed countries, WFP decreased the number of countries in which it operates, gave greater organizational efforts to operations in complex emergencies, and launched new relationships both in the UN system and with NGOs.

In this new era, emergency food aid can be understood not only a response to people in desperation but also as a resource for bolstering peacekeeping efforts and for initiating a restoration of development activities. The emergency-humanitarian era reinforced mandates already built into WFP (and also in other food agency mandates) of moving from relief toward development outcomes within emergency operations as soon as practicable. This third historical stage, coming amidst reform and budget reductions in the UN, has resulted in a re-oriented WFP. Its operations and goals have altered, its character and morale have been reconfigured and new, often daunting, field tasks have been assumed.

Complex Emergencies Situations

In November 1992 a ship carrying WFP food to Somalia was shelled in Mogadishu harbor by warring clan factions. This unrestrained violence, threatening life-saving food headed toward thousands of desperate refugees, galvanized world opinion. UN and NGO efforts to assist populations facing starvation in Somalia had for months been hampered by the internecine fighting among clan factions. Some lives had already been lost. The shelling was a threshold event. Within a week the US and other countries came to support expanded external intervention. This resulted in a UN mandate calling for coercive military intervention. Troops of the United States joined other UN forces. Together these military forces linked coercive authority with UN and bilateral food deliveries. The UN

military force, coordinating with WFP and non-government agencies, sought to restore sufficient order to allow relief and resettlement of displaced Somalis to occur. Thus humanitarian efforts in a human-created and 'complex' emergency grew to link food deliveries and coercion. As in Iraq earlier, a military deployment and refugee feeding operations were combined to serve as mechanisms for restoring peaceful order. Not all collaboration between food relief and military deployment meet the requirements of Chapter 7 intervention with its peace enforcement goals. Truce observance and other less intrusive peace-keeping missions can also link militarized situations with food relief, as in Angola, Bosnia and Mozambique.

The Somali case is paradigmatic, however. It illustrates the numerous elements in any effort by WFP to use its food resources, including intelligence, procurement, logistics and management. Various other UN bodies can use and share these elements to address emergency needs in situations where peacekeeping is a problem. In Sierra Leone/Liberia, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Eastern Congo (Zaire), Sudan, Bosnia and elsewhere WFP emergency relief supplies have, therefore, been a part of an overall peacekeeping effort. By peacekeeping in this essay I include all situations in which relief efforts occur under conditions of civil violence. Perhaps it should be limited to cases in which external military personnel are present for purposes of advancing public order among the population. This would exclude cases such as Ethiopia (1980s) or Sudan (1980s to the present) in which insurrection was ongoing and interfered with relief efforts. A more inclusive definition, however, is preferable. Thus countries such as Sudan, where UN military intervention has not occurred, pose very similar political and military constraints for WFP. In Sudan protracted conflict threatens the safety of relief workers, and that country holds the largest number of victims of civil conflict who have experienced famine in recent years. In 1998 over 4 million people in Southern Sudan are estimated to be displaced and at risk.

Costs of UN peacekeeping grew from \$480 million in 1991 to over \$3 billion in 1993-95. Since then (by 1997) these costs have declined to less than half that amount. Peacekeeping missions, as noted, are not always present in conflict situations where UN humanitarian agencies are called upon to work. In Sudan, Rwanda or Afghanistan, WFP and other UN agencies working to alleviate suffering operate with difficulty. In these complex insecure areas lacking UN military forces to protect them or to provide logistical assistance, they have required considerable additional operational support. No wonder the budgets of UN agencies, including WFP, UNDP and UNICEF grew from \$4 billion to over \$6 billion in 1994-97. This change reflected the rising costs for the principal

UN agencies to operate in areas of turmoil. The increase also faces uncertain sustainability. Furthermore, high budget levels related to peacekeeping concerns create hesitation to commit to long-term projects.⁹

WFP Efforts in the Context of Peacekeeping

An array of terms for UN responses to internal war have been used. Peacekeeping, the term for the most common UN role historically, was previously reserved for cases where UN troops were present to assist parties to agreements achieve greater reliability for their accord. As the demand for UN action has grown since 1990, the functions for UN forces have also grown. UN 'peacekeeping' discussions are now supplemented with various other terms, many overlapping in their reference: peace creation, peace enforcement, peace maintenance, peace making. As noted above, this essay ignores the distinctions among these terms and the situations to which they refer. It does not matter greatly to WFP's role which of different UN mandates and rules of engagement have been adopted for the deployment of force or even if external UN or other military have arrived. The deterioration of physical safety in an area is the critical element. It changes the character of operations. Efforts to supply food to a targeted populace has higher costs and more food disappearances when there are physical threats to the lives of UN staff and to the targets of their relief efforts. This change occurs when UN military forces are not present, as in Iraq, Sudan or Afghanistan. It also occurs when forces are present in a country, but operate principally to facilitate a transition from civil strife, as in Angola or Mozambique. It occurs in cases where more classical peacekeeping is attempted, e.g., the early stages of the Somalian, Rwandan and Bosnian crises. And it occurs in cases where more coercive peacekeeping is applied, as in Iraq or Somalia after 1992 (but not Rwanda -- after early peacekeeping failed). While the added costs and losses in such cases vary, all challenge WFP with a common problem -- working in a dangerous environment.¹⁰ Furthermore, all cases involve using food to rescue people rather than to assist in economic development.

In all such cases, peacekeeping should be made easier thanks to the assistance to refugees. By overseeing the stabilization and relief needs of an endangered population, UN and NGO agencies reduce the chaos of a military conflict. Non-combatants flood into camps, where their temporary human needs are met. Camps provide basic order and structure to people's lives, making displaced peoples a more manageable problem as steps are taken toward ending war. In Bosnia, for example, WFP and UNHCR efforts reduced the flood of refugees crossing into Germany, Austria and elsewhere in Europe. Thus among the principal benefits of humanitarian efforts for

peacekeeping are enhanced stability in a region and reduced burdens on neighboring states. Literally millions of lives have been improved, even saved, by WFP humanitarian efforts in over a dozen countries during the 1990s.

Principles that shaped development uses of food aid can be used effectively in these longer-term emergencies. Establishing conditions for resettlement and employment in peaceful areas, undertaken for those who have taken refuge in camps, helps restore stability. Purchasing and using local goods in emergencies also can help local economies, reducing possible tensions between refugees and permanent residents in an area, as well as preventing imported food from being a destabilizing influence on local markets. In Somalia, for example, in 1993 once peaceful conditions were improved, a plan of helping local food markets was implemented. Imported rice was sold in Mogadishu, increasing the food supply for urban dwellers, including militia members who, if hungry, might steal food; and funds generated were used to purchase maize produced by Somali farmers near refugee camps for feeding the displaced people in these camps their more familiar food. Thus dietary preferences, urban food supply and remunerative farm gate prices were all enhanced by using a development-oriented food aid management principle.

The transition toward sustainable livelihood and a secure environment is not without peril. Especially in the initial rescue stages, the temporary provision of food to victims of a disintegrating domestic order may prolong or exacerbate the conflicts and add to the costs of peacekeeping as well. Hutu genocide leaders who took up residence in relief camps in the Eastern Congo, for example, used the food and supplies provided for needy refugees as a cloak to extract a tax on relief efforts. Eventually, from the protection of the camps, they were able to launch military attacks. The inability to separate fighters and victims in such camps invites such extortion from UN resources by those inside camps. Another form of rent-seeking, taxing the external feeding effort, is through offers of protection to otherwise insecure camps. Here, local militia, as in Somalia and the Congo (in the latter case by troops loyal to Mobutu) learn to sell services to UN and NGO agencies. These practices can have destructive effects on peacekeeping. The work of UNHCR, along with WFP and other UN agencies, for example, may have prolonged insecurities in Rwanda and even provided incentives for the coalition under Kabila that eventually successfully overthrew the Mobutu regime. The employment by the UN of Zairian military personnel around the Goma area had indirect and dramatic effects on UN peacekeeping.

Such cases demonstrate that the humanitarian goal of rescue and the peacekeeping goal of the suppression of violence can come into conflict. Existing UN arrangements offer little hope of overcoming such outcomes that

work at cross-purposes. The disjointedness of relief efforts makes this very difficult, at least in recent experience. UN organizational structure has been a formidable barrier to concerted policy in humanitarian responses, especially in complex emergencies. The change of DHA to a coordinating function may help reduce the

‘highly decentralized, feudal nature of the response system.’ As Natsios described it in 1996, the UN system had: three central headquarters staff directorates in the secretariat (humanitarian affairs, peacekeeping operations and political affairs); the big four UN organizations (UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR); 40 major relief NGOs’ the ICRC (and the Red Cross Movement, which is an organizationally discrete entity); the military units making up international forces (all of which report back operationally to their military command structures in their home countries rather than to the UN force commander in the field); the US State Department and foreign ministries of other interested countries; and the foreign disaster response offices of donor countries (OFDA and ECHO). If one were present at the creation of this Byzantine system, one could not have created a more complex and convoluted structure.¹¹

The Executive Director’s personal authority is a vital element in strengthening WFP’s capacity to relieve problems of complex agency relations or other barriers caused by competing interests among combatants. These often occur in peace promotion situations rather than peacekeeping where UN troops are already deployed. Thus, Executive Director James Ingram played a key role in opening a port for use of food aid to Ethiopian refugee camps in the 1980s, and Catherine Bertini, Executive Director since 1992, has led efforts to target and deliver emergency food aid in North Korea. Both humanitarian undertakings involved negotiations with Marxist regimes to rationalize efforts. Both fit larger peacekeeping functions. Reducing desperation from food insecurity serves as a conflict prevention measure. Stabilizing food shortages can be an important phase in a comprehensive peacekeeping undertaking. With sufficient food for those with guns, they have far less incentive to use violence to steal food from others. While relief operations themselves, especially ones involving camps, may complicate peacekeeping, food security itself is a natural ally in emergency efforts to restore peace.

Challenges of Complex Emergencies

With the rise of its involvement in complex emergencies the World Food Programme has faced three challenges. These challenges have been, first, to coordinate the provisioning of food aid relief from multiple

sources and agencies; second, to meet extraordinary logistical tasks; and third, to operate within an insecure environment.

Coordination. Situations in which coordination occurs between WFP and other humanitarian agencies, including non-government organizations, have grown. In complex emergencies coordination is an obvious and essential part of performing its task and has led WFP to enter into formal and informal agreements with numerous other agencies including NGOs, bilateral donors and private sector enterprises. As early as the era of emergency responses to the 1974 Bangladesh famine WFP has played a role in coordinating food aid donations from multiple sources. Doing so in the 1990s, especially as part of a UN (or West African) peacekeeping effort, however, poses additional problems and burdens compared to its earlier coordination work in response to natural disasters or market failures. Management of food supplies coming from a variety of locations and funding sources is a daunting task. Different foods in quite different amounts arrive at various harbors, airports, and warehouses. To rationally allocate these among various recipients is extremely difficult. Problems are multiplied when relief operations can be halted, hijacked or diverted by local militias. Even in cases of civil conflict in the mid-1980s, for example in Ethiopia, WFP could work with an Ethiopian ministry assisted by the coercive authority of the state. Its efforts to relieve famine occurred in safe conditions with little food stolen. WFP worked inside government regulated areas, leaving bilateral donors and NGOs to assist the Eritreans, Tigrayans and others in rebellion against Mengistu's government. Later, in Mozambique, safety was less available and the number of lost shipments higher, but the WFP/government relationship was maintained. Thus, prior to recent emergencies the principal partners for the World Food Programme have been recipient governments' ministries. Indeed, in its development operations WFP has invariably provided its support as part of a national government effort whether in education, public works, or health. In some countries specific projects have been coordinated with parallel efforts supported by NGOs as practical, for example in India and Egypt. Thus the historic norm for WFP is for its food aid to be coordinated with and facilitated by a government ministry.

In the complex emergencies where peacekeeping is a goal, however, the WFP must deal with a liaison, with military authority and sometimes with rival ones simultaneously, and with a myriad of parallel agencies, each providing various items of emergency relief. Most often this includes the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Childrens Fund (UNICEF). Coordination must be worked out both in the field and

among headquarters staff. To facilitate this, WFP has Official Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with several UN bodies, including UNHCR and UNICEF.

In addition to such formal memorandums, quite practical understandings exist among staff in the several UN bodies addressing emergencies. Relying on formal and informal norms facilitates cooperation and sharing of expertise in UN field operations. In practice this remains imperfect. WFP also works directly in the field with a number of NGOs. Since 1995 WFP has negotiated formal arrangements with twelve of these bodies. Among NGOs there are important distinctions. The most unique one, the ICRC, for example, plays a diffuse role in identifying needs, supplying information and assisting with safe access for convoys. Other NGOs are quite different. They cooperate as parallel and sometimes direct managers of food deliveries. In Angola, for example, CARE, Save the Children, and World Vision cooperated with WFP in reaching over 1.8 million people in 1997. In Northern Iraq WFP provides food while Save the Children oversees a jointly agreed distribution plan. The NGO alliances, however, are fragile since NGOs not only implement on behalf of WFP in failed state situations, but they also compete in Brussels and Washington for resources for projects that they directly seek to manage.

Complex emergencies have created opportunities for leadership by WFP in coordinating food deliveries, usually the most costly resources provided in emergencies. In such cases WFP or a special coordinator for the UN appointed by the Secretary-General normally keeps donor NGOs in daily contact and hosts weekly coordination meetings. Improved coordination among relief, military and political efforts is especially needed when the Security Council approves interventions that violate state sovereignty, as in Somalia and Iraq. Surprisingly, the Northern Iraq episode in 1991 in which military and NGO entities collaborated to rescue Kurdish populations fleeing Republican Guard Troops, worked well thanks to the few agencies involved. Organizational prerogatives were not a concern, as has proved the case in many complex emergencies.¹²

WFP's ability to coordinate is limited by its weak status in the UN system. Hence the creation of a New York-based system-wide coordination office. Nonetheless, WFP remains a subordinate organization to FAO and the United Nations. Ironically the resources it handles are often far more impressive than its authority. This imbalance has made for an especially clumsy situation at times. Military authorities from various nations arriving in Somalia or from West African countries in Liberia have been able to coordinate with WFP largely through other UN agencies since, in the field, officially WFP is under the aegis of the UNDP resident representative, the chief official for WFP in a country.¹³

Logistics. Food is a bulky, perishable commodity. It requires expert management to be successfully transported and stored; many detailed decisions occur when food is moved from an exporting country (or from elsewhere in a recipient country when there is adequate local production) to distribution points. Relief camps are seldom in cities or near good transportation links. Hence, knowledge of shipping, demurrage, handling, customs, warehousing, inland transport and theft control are necessary. Where complex emergencies exist, frequently local trucking and warehousing firms have disappeared. Thus WFP has to create its own transport and warehouse facilities. These physical resources are costly. In addition managing them, especially in emergency relief situations in which roads are not only bad but also dangerous, requires skills and training quite different from those that were more central for WFP staff in its earlier stages of its historical evolution. Especially in the 1980s, WFP professional staff training most emphasized adding knowledge of nutritional assessments and economic development planning.

Compared to other UN agencies and most NGOs, however, WFP has long experience with logistic issues. These management tasks were honed by 30 years of experience by one of the major divisions inside WFP, and skills for these tasks always constituted one area in which regular staff training was provided. Local employees in ‘stable’ countries, for example, have proved quite valuable as resources for staffing emergency operations elsewhere, utilizing the training and experience in facilitating logistics developed in their own country. The growth of the WFP after 1975 created much of the need for this capacity in logistical implementation. With increased demands and resources by WFP’s member states, logistical capabilities grew in an incremental manner without qualitative changes in status or procedures. Over this period WFP was simply asked to perform expanded tasks within its original development-oriented mandate. Expanding its work in Africa in the 1980s, for example, challenged WFP to deepen its experience in picking liners and, when possible, bulk carriers. In addition, contracting for deliveries in remote areas or by aircraft also was mastered. Amounts shipped grew as European states offered their unallocated food aid commodities to WFP for use in Africa; small donors asked WFP to manage the shipment of their bilateral aid to recipients. Staff expansion and redeployment has occurred relatively smoothly as emergencies have required, therefore. Moreover, as the challenge of delivering more food under emergency conditions grew after 1984, the logistical capacity of WFP responded by delivering more than just food relief to refugees. Often WFP transport resources far outstripped those of other providers to refugee camps, so that WFP was invited to play a diffuse role in moving items. Medicine, shelter, and other non-food items have been transported by WFP during UN relief

operations. Both in natural emergencies and ones arising from the breakdown of law and order, other UN agencies, notably the UNHCR, has relied on WFP logistics.¹⁴ WFP also moves food into recipient country locations in a contractual relationship with NGOs who are responsible for its actual dispersion to a targeted population.

Thus logistical support has adapted over time and has become an important element that WFP brings to UN coordination in complex emergencies. Liaison among multiple agencies moving emergency supplies has also entailed making sure that no gaps or failures occur in the food distribution network. The movement of provisions in various locations, ones often provided by different and autonomous actors, has required use of detailed, timely information as well as sharing of actual transport resources -- trucks, trains, draft animals, barges and even porters. The common goal has been adequate provision of people at different locations and at comparable levels of support, so that refugees would not have an incentive to move from one location to another.

A second aspect of the logistical challenge of complex emergency operations has been paying for costly logistics. WFP, since the 1970s, had handled the bulk of its own shipping arrangements; it could even earn cash through its billable shipping services to small bilateral donors. As WFP was drawn into emergency peacekeeping tasks in the 1990s, its logistical experts were in a position to manage the unusual details and unforeseeable crises that invariably attend getting food to difficult locations. Among UN agencies, it had the expertise, information, and experience to oversee off-loading, storage and in-country transportation. It was accustomed to doing this with its own vehicles when local private haulers were unavailable. Such logistical experience was often an important advantage WFP offered to both the NGO community and to UN agencies and governments. Emergency operations, however, entailed a more rapid draw-down of physical resources, such as vehicles. This was the price paid to ensure that food and relief supplies (water, clothing, tents) reached distant areas. With heavy use over treacherous roads, equipment life during emergencies is abnormally short. Without an agency to raise funds, procure and oversee the use of inland transport, however, the management of emergency relief during peacekeeping would be unworkable.

Most logistic management and even some direct emergency costs were funded through regular budget expenditures until the mid-1990s. As WFP shifted responsibilities from development work to emergency or 'rescue' efforts, new formulas for cost recovery in emergencies were devised. Instead of development work subsidizing emergency efforts, a neutral or even reverse funding arrangement was negotiated with key donors.

Insecure Environment. In cases where peacekeeping is underway, not only logistical costs escalate. Lives as well as shipments are at risk. Food must be moved over dangerous terrain if people are to be helped. The conflict, however, may place both UN employees and targeted food aid recipients' lives at greater risk if militia are also hungry or see food as a weapon in their conflict. Consider a recent case in Liberia. In September 1996, 40 displaced Liberians were massacred hours after they received food aid bags. The event prompted others, displaced by the civil war in Liberia, to beg workers to stop bringing them food, as they feared the aid was putting them in even graver danger than the war that drove them from their homes. Even WFP staff in Liberia have become targets of violence.

Such instances have reinforced the notion that UN assistance must be accompanied by physical protection not only for the recipients of the aid but also for those who deliver it to them.¹⁵ WFP inaugurated a military liaison unit (ALITE) in 1996 to facilitate coordination of its rapid response with military officials. This WFP unit, newly approved and staffed by military trained personnel, has the goal of integrating the logistical needs of WFP with military assets.¹⁶

The greater the insecurity, the more the need to coordinate food aid deliveries with military operations grows. David Ramsbotham points out military guards, anti-kidnap precautions and evacuation plans are all advisable for an agency such as WFP. He states:

'It is becoming increasingly apparent that the field operations of humanitarian Agencies cannot count automatically on their name, or that of the UN to guarantee their security -- particularly if they enter a conflict situation before a UN Mission is firmly established. For example, the situation in the UNHCR refugee camps for Rwandan Hutus in Zaire shows what can happen when a crisis of this scale produces risk and volatility. . . . The point is that preventive humanitarian action is now almost invariably dangerous and must be provisioned accordingly. If there is an accompanying military deployment, the military must be prepared to assist those with humanitarian responsibilities in any way they can.'¹⁷

Organizational Impacts on WFP from Emergency Peacekeeping Operations

In order better to provide emergency feeding, WFP has reorganized. The unit overseeing emergency operations, which had been given autonomy in the 1980s, was integrated back into field operations overseeing

country projects. Regional collaboration has been emphasized within operations. The Middle East and Latin America regions operation's administrations have relocated to their respective regions, while the Asian and African divisions remain at Rome headquarters. In the field, the integration of regular development and emergency operations has shifted management resources out of development. Fewer development projects are being prepared for future commitments. Both headquarters and field staff give high attention to quick emergency response and the management of regional relief. When possible oversight for an emergency operation is decentralized, as in WFP efforts in Liberia and Sierre Leone.

Conclusion

Studies of the WFP in the early 1990s, noting the broad call for reform of multilateral institutions at the time, proposed ways to streamline development efforts. Discussions within WFP explored prospects for its work to be more closely coordinated with the UNDP or even the World Bank. Bringing development agencies under one umbrella was also a goal entertained by the UN generally, an approach to be coordinated under leadership of an Under-Secretary General. A decade later, as the century draws to a close, WFP has become more a humanitarian and emergency response agency. Coordination and even consolidation are still issues for WFP in discussions of UN reform. While still looking to improve efficiency and to increase its coordination with, if not amalgamation into other UN bodies, WFP now has its strongest links with UN and NGO agencies providing relief. This is reflected in formal cooperation arrangements, in the priority of staff to emergency operations, and in the effort to improve liaison with military officials in peacekeeping situations. Such UN reform, if carried to consolidation, would place WFP under the UN in New York, with Humanitarian Affairs overseeing WFP and UNHCR. Reform proposals by academics and by the US government have proposed such schemes. Alternatively, an expanded UNHCR mandate, possibly with WFP playing a supportive role, could also be a consolidation strategy.¹⁸ However much emergency coordination has grown, consolidation seems unlikely while distinct food aid contributions exist within the global aid system.

In this third, current stage of WFP evolution, emergencies have impacted not only liaison work of WFP but also its intellectual focus. A shift from economic development to social reconstruction is reflected in the language of WFP documents. Child development, family support, nutritional and social outcomes have superseded efficiency

and investment in statements of mission policy concerns. These linguistic shifts are underpinned by changes in WFP personnel, their task assignments, and patterns of explicit collaboration.

What are the implications of these changes in WFP over the last decade? One is that a debate over the most important mission for food aid, short-term relief or long-term change has been resolved in favor of the former. Emergencies always took precedence; now they are the principal function as well. This outcome vindicates the policy preferences of Nordic and other donor countries who have long favored the exclusive use of food aid for emergencies. Their preferences have now been realized in practice. This outcome is due largely to shifts in the global situation, however, rather than to a triumph of policy analysis. The US, the largest food supplier, abandoned its reluctance to channel emergency food aid multilaterally. Refugees and internally displaced populations facing starvation without emergency food relief have grown. WFP responded.

A second implication is that short-term immediate problems now dominate the work of WFP. These create a vulnerability. If the anarchic conditions that spawned the growth of emergencies and attendant famine threats subside, WFP is likely to face serious resource contractions. With the tightening of ODA funds generally, arguments that food aid is the second or third best form of development assistance may prevail. Food aid would continue to decline as a share of world food trade. Food security would be a goal justifying agricultural research, improved trade and more humane IMF/World Bank conditionality. WFP would become increasingly an emergency response organization, but an agency with less business. Unlike fire departments which do not shrink when business is slow (at least right away), WFP as a food aid deliverer is likely to shrink more noticeably. NGOs face a similar problem. In the 1990s they too have become more often managers of relief operations than overseers of development projects. With fewer longer-term projects aimed at institution-building, human capital formation or infrastructure creation, a reduction in emergency needs will entail a smaller mission and budget. Development activity helped subsidize overhead costs of emergency efforts prior to the 1990s; the reverse has occurred, to a degree, recently. With WFP more dependent for resources that are pledged for short-term emergency work, the organization is more subject to volatile, boom and bust cycles in response to global disasters. As such, its organizational form may evolve to expansion and contraction of peripheral staff, with a smaller professional long-term core.

A final implication of WFP's evolution affects its global policy for the future. The Executive Board and WFP's Executive Director, currently lacking prominence in the UN system, are limited in choosing specific niches

for WFP in UN global governance efforts. For example, the coordination of humanitarian efforts during complex emergencies, a task WFP could facilitate, has formally been under the aegis of the DHA. A standing committee (set up in 1992) included such 'big' UN agencies such as FAO and WHO as well as the ICRC, but not WFP. Proposals about humanitarian relief focus often on the UNHCR, UNICEF, and the newly reorganized Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Agency roles have all been changing. While the WFP has shifted toward more emergency operations, its companion operations agencies in refugee relief, such as the UNHCR, have also grown dramatically. From 1990 to 1996 the UNHCR more than doubled its staff, budget, and material resources. As a result transport and other services, that in the 1980s WFP primarily was equipped to provide in the field, are now available for sharing among agencies under OCHA oversight.¹⁹

Two options exist as WFP's management plans for the future. In one the WFP could evolve further toward collaboration with and funding of other agencies -- primarily NGOs -- in humanitarian and emergency work. This would complete the shift from working with national governments to working more directly with recipients. Development objectives would be built into the final phase of emergency work, as now -- but without a phase-over to follow-on projects. WFP would be a global manager and broker for donor interests and aligned NGO actions. Possibly it could slowly take over all emergency and food aid functions from donors. This option would need support by OCHA and other UN agencies. It would need to be consistent with the evolving division of labor in the UN system.

The other policy choice for WFP's new role would be for it to take on more the characteristics of an NGO.

The ICRC is perhaps a model it could follow, tying together stand-by International Emergency Food Reserve (IEFR) pledges as a resource with an offer of good offices and strict neutrality between or among combating parties in the field. Given its heritage within the UN system this option would require substantial entrepreneurial efforts.

NOTES

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- ¹. Data in this essay are from the WFP web site, as of April 1998 (<http://www.WFP.org/>) and the US Mission to the United Nations, *Global Humanitarianism in Emergencies, 1997*, New York: April 1997.
 - ². See Mitchel Wallerstein, *Food for War: Food for Peace*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980, and Ross Talbott, *The Four World Food Agencies*, Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1990.
 - ³. See Mordecai Ezekiel, *Uses of Agricultural Surpluses to Finance Economic Development in Under-Developed Countries*, 1955, published in vol. of reprints, *Food Aid for Development: Three Studies* by Ezekiel, et. al., Rome: FAO, 1985; Vernon Ruttan (ed.), *Why Food Aid?*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.
 - ⁴. See John Shaw and Edward Clay, *World Food Aid*, London: James Currey Ltd., 1993.
 - ⁵. See Report of the International Wheat Council, London: 1981.
 - ⁶. Data are from InterFAIS, Rome: WFP, May 1997.
 - ⁷. 'Food Crops and Shortages,' Rome: FAO, February 1998.
 - ⁸. Andrew Natsios, 'NGOs and the UN System in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: Conflict or Cooperation?' in Thomas G. Weiss and Leon Gordenker (eds.), *NGOs, the UN and Global Governance*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996, p. 68.
 - ⁹. Reuben P. Mendez, 'Financing the United Nations and the International Public Sector,' in *Global Governance*, September-December, 1997, pp. 283-289.
 - ¹⁰. Complex emergency situations with the military elements have led to consider reflection on new response modalities. See Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Mercy Under Fire: War and the Global Humanitarian Community*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995; Joanna Macrae and Anthony Zwi (eds.), *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*, London: Zed Books, 1994; and Michael W. Doyle, Ian Johnstone, and Robert C. Orr (eds.) *Keeping the Peace: Multidimensional UN Operations in Cambodia and El Salvador*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
 - ¹¹. Andrew S. Natsios, 'NGOs and the UN System in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: Conflict or Cooperation?' in *NGOs, the UN, & Global Governance*, Thomas G. Weiss & Leon Gordenker (eds.), Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996, pp. 78-79.

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12. Observation of Barnett Baron, Executive Vice-President of Save the Children Foundation, during this period.
13. See Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Mercy Under Fire: War and the Global Humanitarian Community*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.
14. An accord in 1988 between WFP and UNHCR was worked out by the then Director of the Office of Emergency Operations, Broniek Szynalski, in which WFP, using both its local and international staff, played a central role in providing support services in refugee situations to a variety of donor agencies.
15. U.S. Committee for Refugees, *World Refugee Survey 1997*, p. 24.
16. The WFP proposal for ALITE stated: 'In the recent past WFP has made use of military assets in several emergency situations including airlift operations in Ethiopia, Southern Sudan, Somalia, former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the use of military escorts in Somalia, de-mining and road rehabilitation in Mozambique and Angola, and numerous joint activities with national militaries in a variety of countries. . . . Many militaries in the donor countries, cognizant of this need, have already established humanitarian liaison focal points with which ALITE will establish close working relationships.' ([http://wfp.org./](http://wfp.org/))
17. Sir David Ramsbotham, 'Coordination is the Key,' in Jim Whitman and David Pocock (eds.), *After Rwanda: The Coordination of United Nations Humanitarian Assistance*, New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1996, p. 121.
18. Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, *Preventing Deadly Conflict: Final Report*, Washington: Carnegie Commission, 1997, pp. 130, 137; and Antonio Donini, 'Asserting Humanitarianism in Peace-Maintenance,' *Global Governance*, January-March 1998, pp. 81-96.
19. For example, in 1998 UNHCR vehicles transported WFP food to refugee camps in Tanzania. Further, in Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), for example, once a collaborative WFP-UNICEF effort, NGO and UN efforts now operate under OCHA which launches consolidated UN appeals for humanitarian aid needs. Thus in April 1998 WFP needs for OLS of \$31 million were part of a \$36 million 'Inter-agency Appeal for Sudan.'