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The World Food Programme is pleased to participate in this

conference which will provide an opportunity for the many countries, development agencies, and non-governmental organizations represented here to examine some key issues facing us at the end of the twentieth century. The outcome of this conference will have significant impact on future population policies of most, if not all countries. This will greatly determine the state of future world food security. Access to food by the hundreds of millions of hungry poor people around the world and their well being is at the center of the mandate of the World Food Programme. The theme around which our discussions will be centered is Of course Population and development. However, given the interrelationships among demographic, socio-cultural and economic factors, the discussions will in fact embrace a vast range of topics.

While each agency has its own particular orientation, we all work toward the common goal of promoting sustainable development. In our efforts to attain this goal we face many obstacles. Agencies do not always agree as to the best ways of addressing them; furthermore, each agency's approach must be designed within the context of its own mandate. Nonetheless, the successes and failures of the past three "development decades" have led to consensus on at least two points:

first, the need for concerted action by development agencies to eliminate the overriding, fundamental obstacles to development. (The converse being the futility of ad hoc, "cosmetic" interventions which address only the secondary causes or, worse, the effects, of the real obstacles)

second, the need for development to be people-centered: not only to be focused on people's real needs but to involve people themselves in determining these needs and how best to address them. Agreement on these

two points has unfortunately not been followed by their translation into actual practice. Efforts to do so must continue, and hopefully the discussions of the coming days will contribute to this process. In this context, I should like to review briefly WFP's experience in an area which is directly relevant to the theme of this Conference: the promotion of education for all and, in particular, the elimination of gender inequality in access to education.

No single factor contributes more to human development than education: it increases people's productivity and capacity to earn income, stimulating economic growth. Female education plays an even more direct role in development having been demonstrated to be a major contributor to both slower population growth and improved family health. The mechanisms through which this occurs are well-known: more schooling for women leads to postponed age at marriage, to a higher propensity to plan childbearing in a rational way, and to increased knowledge (and practice) of correct family health, hygiene, and nutrition. It is widely accepted that raising the educational status of the world's female population, especially in the less developed countries, is a precondition for achieving rational patterns of population growth and spatial distribution. The importance of education in general, and women's education in particular, in promoting socio-economic development was a main theme of the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien in 1990 and should be reaffirmed by participants at the present conference.

Since the World Food Programme was created over thirty years ago, a substantial proportion of its assistance has been allocated to the education sector, The majority of this assistance has been in the form of support to primary school feeding programmes. The design and modalities of WFP-assisted school feeding projects have evolved over the years, from an approach which focused on simply providing a snack or

lunch to schoolchildren (already a worthy objective) to the present attempts to maximize the development impact of the food assistance.

One important change has been the increased attention given to promoting the enrollment and attendance of girls in primary schools. The potential impact-- social, economic, and demographic--of improving the educational status of women has been solidly documented. Thus, activities aimed at attaining this objective are clearly addressing some of the fundamental root causes of poverty and lack of development. Recognizing this, WFP builds into its school feeding projects, to the greatest extent possible, measures to ensure the highest participation of girls (including in certain selected cases, special incentives for families enrolling their daughters)

Experience has demonstrated that provision of a school lunch is especially effective in areas where children must walk long distances to school, a factor which discourages girls' attendance in particular.

WFP's experience in this area illustrates well the two development principles noted above, i.e., the need for coordinated donor efforts and the desirability of people-centered, participatory approaches. It is obvious that provision of a school meal is not in itself sufficient, particularly in cases where cultural barriers to girls' school attendance exist. Complementary inputs, as well as community participation, are also necessary. For example, involving parents' associations and communities at large provides a means of sensitizing people to the importance of education for girls; in addition community participation contributes to project sustainability. Ensuring the provision of essential inputs besides food -classrooms and equipment, textbooks, qualified teachers, etc. -- require coordination and

collaboration among various donors and national Governments. Such collaboration is also needed to ensure curricula are suited to country conditions and that essential notions of population are included. School feeding may then be seen as one of a number of essential inputs necessary to attain not only the objective of increasing girls' attendance but also those related to improving the quality and accessibility of primary education for all.

Ensuring girls receive primary education is only a first step. As the Draft Programme of Action of the present Conference states, "[the] empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is . . . essential for the achievement of sustainable development ." Chapter IV ,A . 4.1)WFP supports numerous activities aimed at attaining such improvements many of which are implemented within the context of WFP's rural development project portfolio. During their formulation, WFP requires that such projects be examined from a gender point of view and that the promotion of the well-being of women occur to the greatest extent possible as a part of mainstream project activities (e.g., by training and employing female as well as male extension agents; ensuring women farmers benefit equally with men receiving agricultural inputs).

In certain cases it is judged appropriate to implement projects which target women exclusively; for example, in countries in which large numbers of assetless women are living, often alone, in extremely difficult conditions. WFP has for many years supported projects targetting such women in India and Bangladesh, where the objective is to provide skills training, credit and other inputs to increase women's self-sufficiency as well as their self-confidence and social mobility. Both the India and Bangladesh projects include literacy training components. This important activity, as well as technical and vocational

training for women, is also supported by WFP within the context of rural development projects in all regions, with particular emphasis on the least-developed countries.

A critical area in which WFP assistance directly benefits women is in the health sector, where the principal focus of intervention is to support Maternal and Child health Programmes. Most often WFP food aid is used as an incentive to encourage women to attend MCH centres. The services they receive at the centres (depending of course on individual government's health care policies) most often include pre- and post-natal consultations, family planning, health and hygiene education, as well as preventive and curative services for children under age five. WFP's aid to MCH centres is an extremely effective way of targetting women of reproductive age. here again, however, collaboration with other agencies and NGOs becomes essential. The WFP food incentive should never become the primary motivating factor in women's attendance at MCH centres. It is thus imperative that the quality of services provided at the centres be adequate, and this can be assured through collaboration with governments and technical agencies in the health sector.

Another area in which WFP assistance is supportive of the principles stated in the Draft Programme of Action is covered in Chapter IX On population distribution, urbanization and internal migration. Many WFP activities are in support of Government programmes which emphasize the need to "foster a more balanced spatial distribution of the population." For example, here in Egypt WFP has assisted the Government's Programme of land reclamation and settlement of new lands since 1980. Food aid has provided an important. income transfer to settlers during development of their lands. It also serves as an incentive to remain on the lands during the early stages when irrigation,

electricity and other infrastructures are being developed

One of the critical issues which must be faced with regard to population distribution is the ,problem Of rapid urban growth.

While slowing rural to urban migration is rarely an explicit objective of WFP-assisted projects, much of WFP's aid is in support of activities aimed at reducing disparities between levels of development in rural and in urban areas. This is of course a prerequisite to achieving and maintaining rational population distribution. Given its mandate and focus to assist the poorest of the poor, WFP's activities are predominantly in rural areas where most of the poor live. In addition to its large portfolio of projects in support of agricultural production, WFP has over the past three decades allocated an average of 20 percent of its resources to projects aimed at improving rural infrastructure. Most of the latter are in the areas mentioned in Chapter IX, A, 9.6, as being essential to the creation of alternatives to out-migration from rural areas, e.g., providing access to land and water, rehabilitating physical infrastructures, establishing marketing and production cooperatives, and similar activities.

While not wishing to end on a pessimistic tone , I must note that in spite of success in undertaking many of the activities which I have reviewed, WFP -- and all of us --face even greater challenges as we enter the twenty - first century, One such challenge is the growing competition for scarce development resources-- competition among regions, countries, sectors, and, unfortunately, between development and humanitarian assistance. WFP is particularly affected by the latter, as a growing percentage of our resources are required to relieve the pain caused by man made disasters. Let us hope that the recommendations and subsequent actions - resulting from the present Conference can help to

ease some of the pressures (economic and demographic) which contribute to the outbreak of civil strife and other emergency situations which drain precious resources, diverting efforts from socio-economic development which is the precondition for achieving a demographically balanced world.

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