

World Food Programme – An Overview

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The World Food Programme (WFP) is the food assistance branch of the United Nations and it is the world's largest humanitarian organization addressing hunger, with over 14 500 staff, 90 per cent of whom work in developing countries. WFP provides food, on average, to 90 million people per year, 58 million of whom are children. From its headquarters in Rome and more than 80 country offices around the world, WFP works to help people who are unable to produce or obtain enough food for themselves and their families. It is a member of the United Nations Development Group.ⁱ

History

The WFP was first established in 1961 after the 1960 Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Conference. WFP formally started its work in 1963 with a mandate from the FAO and the United Nations General Assembly on a three-year experimental basis. In 1965, the programme was extended to a continuing basis. The programme started its life by voluntary pledges from participating countries in the form of commodities, cash or services such as shipping.ⁱⁱ Now WFP operations are funded by voluntary donations from world governments, corporations and private donors. The organization's administrative costs are only seven percent—one of the lowest and best among aid agencies.

Goals and strategies

WFP strives to eradicate hunger and malnutrition, with the ultimate goal in mind of eliminating the need for food aid itself. The core strategies behind WFP activities, according to its mission statement, are to provide food aid to:

1. save lives in refugee and other emergency situations
2. improve the nutrition and quality of life of the most vulnerable people at critical times in their lives
3. help build assets and promote the self-reliance of poor people and communities, particularly through labour-intensive works programmes

WFP food aid is also directed to fight micronutrient deficiencies, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, and combat disease, including HIV and AIDS. Food-for-work programmes help promote environmental and economic stability and agricultural production.ⁱⁱⁱ

Programmes and achievements

- Since 2008 WFP is coordinating the five-year Purchase for Progress (P4P) pilot project. P4P assists smallholder farmers by offering them opportunities to access agricultural markets and to become competitive players in the market place. The project is underway in 20 of the 21 planned countries and, since the launch, more than 116,000 farmers, warehouse operators and small & medium traders have received training from WFP and partners in improved agricultural production, post-harvest handling, quality assurance, group marketing, agricultural finance and contracting with WFP. More than 207,000 metric tons of food valued at US\$75.6 million have been contracted.^{iv}
- In 2007, the World Food Programme joined forces with YUM! Brands, the world's largest restaurant company, to launch the first annual World Hunger Relief Week, a global campaign to increase awareness about hunger, engage volunteers, and raise critically needed funds to help WFP serve the world's areas of greatest need. World Hunger Relief Week 2007 leveraged the power of nearly 35,000 restaurants around the world, sparking a global movement to end hunger and generating an overwhelming outpouring of support from millions of customers, employees, franchisees and their families
- WFP focuses its food assistance on those who are most vulnerable to hunger, which most frequently means women, children, the sick and the elderly.^v In fact, part of the response to the 2010 Haiti earthquake consisted of distributing food aid to women as experience built up over almost 5 decades of working in emergency situations has demonstrated that giving food to women helps to ensure that it is spread evenly among all household members. School-feeding and/or take home ration programmes in 71 countries help students focus on their studies and encourage parents to send their children, especially girls, to school.
- In 2011, WFP reached 99.1 million people in 75 countries and provided 3.6 million tonnes of food. The number of malnourished children who received special nutritional support in 2011 was over 11 million, up from 8.5 million in 2010. Some 23 million children received school meals or take-home rations. WFP has scaled up its use of cash and vouchers as food assistance tools. Some 4.4 million people received assistance through cash or voucher programmes in 2011. In 2011, WFP bought over 2.4 million metric tons of food, worth more than US\$1.2 billion, in 87 countries. Of the 2.4 million metric tons of food, 71 per cent was purchased in developing countries, representing approximately US\$870 million and more than 1.7 million metric tons.
- Emergency assistance. Providing food to people when unforeseen disasters strike is one of WFP's purposes.^{vi} As soon as the local government has requested WFP's help, emergency response mechanisms go into action. Time saved means lives saved, so our Emergency Preparedness team makes sure WFP is ready to go, anytime. They use ground-breaking technology to direct assistance to where it is most needed. <http://www.wfp.org/emergencies>
- The Fast Information Technology and Telecommunications Emergency and Support Team (FITTEST), is a group of technical specialists within the IT division of the World Food Programme (WFP) FITTEST provides IT, telecommunications and electricity infrastructure to support humanitarian aid operations anywhere in the world. Humanitarian emergencies demand rapid interventions that are efficient, coordinated and effective. FITTEST responds to emergency requests and ensures staff are on the ground and ready to operate within 48 hours.
- **Grassroots efforts.** WFP has launched a global advocacy and fundraising event called Walk the World. On one single day each year, hundreds of thousands of people in every time zone all over the world walk to call for the end of child hunger. In 2005, more than 200,000 people walked in 296 locations. In 2006, there were 760,000 participants in 118 countries all over the world. This event is part of the campaign to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, specifically to halve the number of people who suffer from hunger and poverty by 2015.
- World Food Program USA (formerly Friends of WFP) works to solve global hunger, building a world where everyone has the food and nutrition needed to lead healthy, productive lives. WFP USA raises

support for these efforts in the United States by engaging individuals, organizations and businesses, shaping public policy and generating resources for WFP.

Problems and criticisms

- Critics claim the World Food Programme to be harmful to the aided countries. Opinion exists, that the food aid increases corruption as local politicians have the opportunity to steal some of the aid to bribe voters or to sell the aid in the black markets killing the local agriculture.
- Another criticism: WFP people as an organisation are in the absurd situation of, on the one hand, being dedicated to the fight against hunger while, on the other hand, being faced with unemployment where hunger actually eliminated
- WFP answers too easily to the calls of the corrupted governments, and supplies too much of food aid leading to reduction of the production of local farmers as no one can compete with the UN's World Food Program.^{vii}

ⁱ Shaw, D. John. The world's largest humanitarian agency : the transformation of the UN World Food Programme and of food aid / D. John Shaw. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

ⁱⁱ World Food Program : what it is, what it does, how it works. [Roma] : FAO, [1970]

ⁱⁱⁱ Report on the World Food Program by the executive director. Rome, United Nations, 1965.

^{iv} Shaw, D. John. The UN World Food Programme and the development of food aid / D. John Shaw ; foreword by Sir Hans Singer D. Houndmills [England] ; New York : Palgrave, 2001.

^v Food aid and the role of women in development : World Food Programme in action. Rome : The Programme, 1976.

^{vi} World Food Programme journal. 1992

^{vii} Ross, Sandy. The World Food Programme in global politics / Sandy Ross. Boulder, Colo. : FirstForumPress, 2011, p.191-200.