

## **ECOSOC Operational Activities Segment 2022**

### **Session 6: Informal session on addressing root causes of conflict and humanitarian crises to achieve sustainable development**

**19 May 2022, ECOSOC Chamber, 9:00 a.m. – 11:20 a.m.**

**Ms Jane Pearce – WFP Country Director a.i.**

- *How has the system responded in crisis contexts to support the resilience of social support systems, protecting lives and livelihoods and complementing humanitarian responses? How can we ensure the inclusion of women, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in comprehensive policies to address development, humanitarian and peacebuilding challenges?*
- *How far have we come in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into UN development system's support to countries policies to realize the SDGs? What are the key challenges and how can they be overcome?*

#### **5-6 MINUTES**

Thank you. Honourable chair, distinguished representatives, and fellow panellists, it is a great honour for me to be here virtually with you today to provide some ground-level examples of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus and reflect on challenges and possible solutions.

In Bangladesh, WFP's humanitarian efforts focus on the Rohingya refugee crisis as well as the recurring natural disasters that hit the country. Alongside this, WFP's development activities, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, aim to support the government in finding solutions for entrenched poverty and help local adaptation to the ever-growing impact of climate change.

For WFP, as a 100 percent voluntarily funded operation, striking a balance between the scope and scale of the humanitarian and development activities while adjusting to the realities of existing budgetary limitations is a difficult task. Finding the right balance between both the immediate pressing concerns while

seeking to resolve underlying root causes is a delicate intersection in the daily work of WFP and its partners on the ground.

Let me provide a concrete example of the interaction between our humanitarian and longer-term development actions in Bangladesh.

Nearly all the 900,000+ refugees in Cox's Bazar are reliant on humanitarian assistance for their food needs<sup>1</sup>. WFP provides general food assistance using a network of stores across the camps where refugee families can choose from a range of food items. These stores are cashless and use a digital solution created by WFP called Building Blocks<sup>2</sup>. This is a shared and secure<sup>3</sup> humanitarian platform for coordinated assistance delivery to refugees using blockchain technology.

In Cox's Bazar, WFP deposits a virtual value of \$12 in each refugee's digital Building Blocks account each month. In addition, there are top-ups for vulnerable households, and children attending nutrition programmes. Beneficiaries then spend their available value at the stores, which are run by WFP-partnered retailers. All the commodities are sourced from Bangladeshi vendors and fresh food products are purchased from nearby farmers. In this way, the refugees bring over \$140 million per year to the local economy<sup>4</sup>.

To support enhanced agricultural production from within local farming communities, WFP, together with FAO and several NGOs, is organizing farmer groups to grow food that will be supplied to the network of WFP stores in the camps.

Beyond these efforts to address the Rohingya refugee crisis, WFP is also supporting the ministry of women and children affairs and the ministry of social welfare in their national social protection schemes. At the onset of the COVID-19

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<sup>1</sup> The latest findings from REVA 5 showed that 95 per cent of all Rohingya households are moderately to highly vulnerable and remain entirely dependent on humanitarian assistance, similar to 2020 (96 per cent). These results reflect the slow economic recovery of an already fragile population with no income sources nor livelihood opportunities.

<sup>2</sup> Building Blocks also benefits more than 100,000 Syrian refugees living in camps in Jordan as well as in Lebanon for inter-agency coordination of cash-based interventions after the Beirut blast.

<sup>3</sup> It allows beneficiaries to securely<sup>3</sup> access different types of assistance from multiple humanitarian organizations, therefore reducing the complexity of accessing humanitarian support.

<sup>4</sup> At the end of each month, transaction data stored on Building Blocks is used for reconciliation with retailers, who are reimbursed based on actual expenditures. Working with retail partners based in Bangladesh, rather than importing commodities for direct distribution, helps spur sustainable development and boost the local economy. A record of the transaction is updated in real-time on the blockchain, enabling organizations across the humanitarian sector to ensure individuals are receiving the right assistance, at the right time.

pandemic, WFP, FAO and UNFPA quickly mobilized to support the resilience of government social safety net programmes in some of the most vulnerable areas in Dhaka, focusing in particular on vulnerable women and girls, persons with disabilities and the elderly. In this context, WFP designed a programme that combined cash transfers with behaviour change communications to incentivise the purchasing of healthy foods. In parallel, FAO worked on the supply chains, linking shops in low-income settlements to farmers in peri-urban areas, while UNFPA distributes female sanitary products. Linking all this is the same blockchain technology used in the WFP stores in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. While still a limited scale project, it helped to translate the humanitarian-development nexus concept into something tangible, using a technological platform developed in a humanitarian crisis context, leveraged to strengthen the resilience and agility of social support systems.

Now to answer the second question, how far have we come in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into the UN development system's support to countries' policies. Bangladesh is one of the countries most affected by natural disasters. Since its independence, WFP has been working with the Government of Bangladesh to address the aftermaths of recurring natural disasters. Our focus is now shifting more and more towards emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction, providing the government with the necessary approaches and tools to better respond to the ever-increasing impact of climate change. Together with partners, WFP has introduced forecast-based financing, one of the tools of the anticipatory actions toolkit, to the ministry of disaster management and relief, alongside other measures like simulations and coordination platforms as a member of the humanitarian coordination task team<sup>5</sup> and lead agency for the logistics and food security clusters. Forecast-based financing has already proven to be quite successful in response to monsoon riverine floods that affect the country on an annual basis. WFP is now piloting how forecast-based financing can be used in the multi-hazard context along the Gulf of Bengal where floodwaters can come from inland, as well as the sea, in addition to from cyclones. To advocate for such new approaches, WFP is increasingly making use of scientific-based research techniques; documenting every step and analysing the humanitarian, as well as, economic costs and benefits. I hope this answers

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<sup>5</sup> In Bangladesh, because of the recurring nature of natural disasters, the clusters remain activated on a permanent basis and are managed through the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (as opposed to the Humanitarian Country Team which is temporarily activated in countries affected by crisis).

the questions and I look forward to discussing this further with the member states.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS 1-2 MINUTES**

Of course, in these few minutes, I could only give you a taste of how we address the challenges that come with responding to simultaneous development and humanitarian challenges, while also addressing the intercommunity challenges that ensue. At the same time, these challenges also represent opportunities. Still, we cannot do this alone, we need the support and expertise of our partner UN agencies and civil society. We also need the funding that makes this possible; timely, flexible, and predictable. As mentioned in the moderator/Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco's opening remarks, this type of sustainable funding is critical to achieve the objectives of dual humanitarian and development actions, that often exist simultaneously. In Bangladesh, the World Bank is providing critical funding in support of the Rohingya crisis, channelled through WFP and other UN agencies. This partnership with international financial institutions is fundamental to supporting the tangible work of the UN system. Furthermore, moving increasingly towards sustainable financing can also help to offset the critical funding gaps present in the current environment. Continuing to join-up work with other UN entities, government ministries and NGOs will boost the creative solutions spanning the humanitarian-development divide. Thank you.