



**World Food
Programme**

**Programme
Alimentaire
Mondial**

**Programa
Mundial de
Alimentos**

**برنامج الأغذية
العالمي**

19 July 2017

Internal Audit of Food Quality and Safety in the WFP Syria Operations (AR/17/09)

Management Response

WFP Management appreciates and welcomes the observations made by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) in its audit report on Food Quality and Safety of WFP Syria operations covering the period of January to December 2016.

Conflict in Syria has entered its seventh year and is not showing any signs of attenuation, deepening the already grim outlook for the economic and social development of the country. Prior to the conflict, Syria was on track to reach the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG), but the human development gains have been dramatically reversed. Syria is now ranked 149 out of 188 countries in the 2015 Human Development Index (HDI), putting the country in the low human development category, with access to essential services, including healthcare, safe water, and education, being severely disrupted.

Soaring food and fuel prices, stagnant salaries, loss of livelihoods, and reduced food production have led to widespread food insecurity across the country, with seven million people unable to meet their food needs and a further two million people at risk of food insecurity. The most vulnerable people live in hard-to-reach and besieged areas. In the 13 besieged areas, home to 624,500 people, all inhabitants are food insecure, and access to assistance is intermittent.

The prolonged violent conflict in Syria has resulted in significant security constraints and access restrictions for WFP's operations. Programme activities are diverse and complex, and in such high-conflict areas, a level of programmatic risk, which may also extend to food quality and safety risks, is expected, particularly in the downstream supply chain covering the last mile distribution to beneficiaries.

Management welcomes OIG's recognition of the Country Office positive practices and initiatives related to: (a) capacity building efforts such as the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs), guidelines and documentation systems for local inspection companies and date bar manufacturers; (b) field monitor, third-party monitor (TPM) and cooperating partner (CP) reports capturing information on satisfaction of beneficiaries with food quality, which is systematically recorded in the Syria Monitoring Database; (c) update and consolidation of food specifications with Syrian Arab Organization for Standardization and Metrology and Ministry of Agriculture; (d) food quality and safety risks are included in the risk register.

Management accepts all the observations and affirms their commitment to implement all the proposed actions with the support and collaboration of the Food Quality & Safety unit in Headquarters (OSCQ) and the Regional Bureau in Cairo, as per agreed timelines. In addition, WFP Management is confident that the implementation of the agreed actions will play a key role in achieving the Country Office goal of reaching 10% of locally procured food.

WFP Management is pleased to note that no high-risks observation were issued and that the implementation of the agreed actions is well underway. WFP Management notes that the following actions have been undertaken to address audit observations:

- i. The Country Office, in consultation with OSCQ, has carried out an assessment of its food quality and safety workload and capacity, in terms of staff and skills required to sustainably support country operations and activities.
- ii. Food standards/specifications for all commodities in the Syrian food basket have been updated to include revised standards as well as quarantine laws and regulations;
- iii. Regular liaison is maintained with all internal through the weekly supply chain coordination meetings/conference calls;
- iv. The Country Office has started implementing the revised consolidated Initial Paper Assessment (IPA) questionnaire for Food Producers & Traders; and all food processors and traders on the SYCO procurement shortlist/roster have been requested to complete IPAs.
- v. The new production plants for one local (Syrian) producer of fortified date bars (FOODCO) has been assessed by OSCQ Food Technologist (on mission – May 2017) and the Country Office FSQ team is following up on implementation of CAPA. The joint assessment for the second production plant is to be completed in July 2017;
- vi. The Country Office has procured and installed temperature and humidity monitoring devices in all WFP managed warehouses;
- vii. A system for timely reporting and consolidation of FSQ incidents has been implemented. Updates and follow up on incidents are discussed in the weekly supply chain operational meetings. Incidents reports are consolidated by the FSQ team using the template recommended by OSCQ;
- viii. As of May 2017, WFP staff presence has been maintained consistently at the warehouses in Damascus, as access constraints were lifted; and
- ix. SOPs for inspection of the re-packing process in WFP warehouses have been revised and a training session for inspectors, on how to enforce key controls, is scheduled for August 2017.

WFP management would like to take this opportunity to thank OIG for its collaboration and support; and to give assurance on our commitment to ensuring the continuous improvement and strengthening of its internal controls, and risk management practices.