

THE BENEFIT OF FAILURE: WFP, FOOD AID AND LOCAL SURVIVAL IN GUINEA-BISSAU, 1998-99

by Hjalte Tin, phd, Center for Development Research, Copenhagen

email contact : hti@cdr.dk

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Abstract

Guinea-Bissau in West Africa offers an important and unusual example of survival in a complex emergency. During the civil war June 1998 through May 1999 a third of the entire population was displaced. They found shelter and food in private homes and no camps were established. International aid response was minimal. This poor response, however, by default strengthened local coping performance. The article explores the tension between international and local responses to the emergency with a focus on World Food Programme (WFP), the agency dominating completely the international food aid effort in Guinea-Bissau.

WFP claimed afterwards that its emergency operation "averted a famine" in Guinea-Bissau. However, the article documents that the nutritional impact of international food aid was practically undetectable. The population survived on its own resources. Secondly, the article argues that the WFP emergency operation by insisting only on assisting IDPs and not their hosts weakened the capacity of key social structures such as extended families to respond to the needs of war-affected people. The experience

highlights a new group of vulnerable persons beginning to be of concern to humanitarian aid: families hosting displaced persons.

WFP failed to deliver the food they had promised. But the consequence of this failure was not necessarily negative for the population of Guinea-Bissau. The article briefly considers the likely consequences had WFP managed to implement their emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau as planned. The conclusion is that the population of Guinea-Bissau probably benefited from the failure of WFP to deliver the food aid they had promised. The population did not suffer because WFP performed poorly, on the contrary they were spared the negative impact likely to have followed a full-scale WFP operation.

INTRODUCTION

Background and data

The study presented in this article was carried out September 2000 through May 2001, and forms part of a larger interdisciplinary study on the effects of the war on Guinean society, funded by the Danish Council for Development Research. In Guinea-Bissau the team was associated with the Bandim Health Project (BHP) engaged since twenty years in longitudinal public health research. I would like to thank the team members, the project staff and the many other persons that have shared their knowledge of Guinea-Bissau, the war and the aid with me. Needless to say, facts and interpretations presented in this article are the sole responsibility of the author.

Information on food aid to Guinea-Bissau were collected from interviews with key actors involved with the food aid, conducted in Bissau Sep.-Nov 2000 and unpublished primary data. Published research on humanitarian aid during the conflict in Guinea-

Bissau is practically non-existent. The special issue of the journal *Soronda. Revista de Estudos Guineenses*, 'Numero Especial 7 de Junho'; published December 2000 in Bissau by Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa (INEP) contains some useful information. 'Nutritional status and mortality of refugee and resident children in a non-camp setting during conflict : follow up study in Guinea-Bissau' by Peter Aaby et. al. in *British Medical Journal* Vol 319, 2 Oct. 1999, introduces some of BHP's controversial findings on different mortality-rates of refugees and hosts in a non-camp settings. Results of the Danish funded research should add substantially to literature on the Guinea-Bissau conflict when published during 2002-3.

Part One gives a brief introduction to Guinea-Bissau and the 1998-99 emergency. Part Two documents the performance and problems of the WFP emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau. Part Three contends the claim made by WFP that it "averted a famine" in Guinea-Bissau. Part Four argues that the WFP emergency operation weakened the capacity of key local social structures to respond to the needs of war-affected people by its insistence on only assisting IDPs and not their hosts. The article rounds off with a discussion of the likely consequences had WFP managed to implement their emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau as planned. The population of Guinea-Bissau probably benefited from the failure of WFP to deliver the food aid they had promised. The population did not suffer because WFP performed poorly, on the contrary they were spared the negative impact likely to have followed a full-scale WFP operation.

1/ THE GUINEA-BISSAU EMERGENCY

Guinea-Bissau in West Africa borders Senegal to the north and Guinea Conakry to the south-east. It is one of Africa's small countries with 36.000 km² flat, relatively fertile land supporting a stable food production of rice and dry grains; cachew nuts is the main export. The population of 1,2 million is ethnically highly segmented yet co-existing with very low levels of inter-ethnic violence. The capital Bissau has a population of 300.000 (1999). Guinea-Bissau has no industry and almost no higher education; the UNDP human development index ranks it amongst the poorest and least developed countries in the world (no. 168 of 174). It is extremely dependent on international aid, which contributed 40% of GNP in 1997. (SIDA 1998 :42; UNDP 1999 :154)

Guinea-Bissau gained independence from Portugal in 1974 under one-party rule. The first multi-party election after independence took place in 1994, electing incumbent President 'Nino' Viera. Donors and international financial institutions heavily involved in the running of Guinea-Bissau reported modest economic improvements during the 1990s. An important development was the entry of Guinea-Bissau into the CFA Zone in 1997, shifting the economic and political influence in Guinea-Bissau from Portugal to France. Part of the deal seems to have been a rapprochement with Senegal, and an end of the semi-secret support of the rebels in Casamance in southern Senegal. The regional power-play fuelled the ensuing civil war in Guinea-Bissau with Portugal in support of the rebel Junta Militar and France backing the President.

[Map 1: Guinea-Bissau; map 2: Bissau city and Biombo illustrating the frontline; forthcoming]

Escalating conflict, June – December 1998

In the early hours of Sunday June 7, 1998 army units under Brigadier Ansumane Mané began an armed uprising against President Nino Veira. The response by the government was an attempt to regain control of the national territory by force. The Junta Militar did not back down, and thus the coup grew into a civil war. A conflict within the power-elite became a national emergency when hundreds of thousands fled their homes in Bissau. The humanitarian response was always subject to the demands of the military struggle. This was the case both of the National Government, the Junta Militar and the key external actors such as the Senegalese Government. Neither the national government nor the Junta Militar spent any money on humanitarian assistance to their own population, while they bought weapons for a large, but unknown amount of money-and they continued the conflict until its ultimate violent resolution.

During the first 72 hours 1.300 Senegalese and 400 Guinea-Conakry troops intervened on the President's side. A few days later the Junta Militar took control of the Army's main depot and the international airport cutting off Bissau from the rest of the country. WFP and all other UN international staff was evacuated from Bissau. With heavy weapons deployed on both sides civilian damage was increasingly inflicted and almost all of its 300.000 inhabitants fled. Fighting continued until July 26, when a ceasefire agreement was brokered, leaving the government in control of Bissau, a few provinsional towns and the Bijagos Islands. The following month perhaps 2/3 of Bissau's internally displaced inhabitants return to the capital. WFP established a small office in Bafata, while no staff was allowed to go back to Bissau.

Fighting broke out on October 18 for a week. Many people fled Bissau for a second time. On October 21-22 the Junta Militar took control of Bafata and Gabu inland and Prabis just outside Bissau. Viera's forces was reduced to a Presidential Guard of 400 men. 2.500 Senegalese and 400 Conakry troops helped him hang on to Bissau and the Bijagos islands. October 26 a new cease-fire was brokered and on November 1 Nino

and Mané signed a peace agreement in Abuja, Nigeria. This deal called for new elections in March and the withdrawal of all Guinean and Senegal troops, to be replaced by ECOMOG peacekeeping troops. A Government of National Unity was named with Nino remaining president but not sworn in.

Endgame, January – May 1999

January 31 heavy shooting on the front line shattered the cease-fire, escalating the next day and forcing many residents to flee the capital. ECOWAS brokered a new cease-fire on February 3. The four days of fighting left 300 killed and 600 wounded (Swedish Emb. estimate). On February 4, three hundred ECOMOG peacekeepers landed in Bissau. Feb 20 the Government of National Unity was finally sworn in with Nino Veira as President. Ansumane Mané did not want to be in the government but had picked Francisco Fadul from the Junta's supreme council to be Premier Minister. March 22 the last Senegalese and Guinea Conakry troops left. The 600 strong ECOMOG force was in place except along the Senegalese border where the Junta denied them permission to deploy. Most people hoped the war was over and the government began planning of reconstruction and development.

The finale came on May 6. ECOMOG could only watch as Mané's forces attacked Bissau with tanks, claiming the presidential guards had refused to disarm. Next day Chief of General Staff Brigadier Umberto Gomes surrendered to Junta forces and Nino was handed over to the Portuguese Embassy for protection. May 9 Portugal granted Nino political asylum and he left Guinea-Bissau on June 6. Estimates of casualties range from two thousand up to six thousand lives. (Jau 2000:106) The conflict caused large physical destruction in the capital, and a major social, political and economic dislocation of an already poor and fragile country. The country has been in a complete paralysis since peace was achieved 7 May, 1999. The promise of the Junta Militar to remove corruption and renew the state was never fulfilled. On November 23, 2000,

Ansumane Mané staged a new coup-attempt. He failed and was killed by troops loyal to the new president Koumba Yala.

2/ THE WFP EMERGENCY OPERATION

The humanitarian access

In terms of humanitarian access to the population the war split Guinea-Bissau into two different zones, Bissau and the 'regions.' The frontline blocked land, sea and air-access to Bissau until mid-February 1999. The Nino government had access only to Bissau, a small part of near-by Biombo province and the Bijagos islands. At the moment of maximum displacement, July 1998, this area contained approximately 100-130.000 displaced and war-affected persons and almost no non-affected groups. This part of Guinea-Bissau received practically no food supplies from the outside world before the end of March 1999, and the population survived on stocks of food stored before the war by commercial traders and WFP. WFP left Bissau when the war began, returning in January 1999.

The Junta Militar had access to the remaining 85% of the country containing approximately 200-310.000 displaced persons and the rest of the population numbering 650-750.000. (WFP and G-B government figures for July 1998) The Junta Militar-controlled regions had no ports or airports of practical use, but road access from Senegal and Guinea Conakry. WFP was not evacuated from this part of Guinea-Bissau. Food consumed in the regions were local grains, imported rice bartered for cashew nuts and a small amount of food aid. Stocks of locally produced foodstuffs (rice and dry-land cereals) was at a minimum in September-October before the harvest in November.

WFP and the Guinea-Bissau emergency: remote geo-politics and few refugees

WFP's emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau must rank among its least successful in terms of performance: in the most difficult and violent period of the conflict, June-December 1998, WFP did not manage to get any food at all into Bissau, the main emergency location, and after two months only 850 tons of food had been provided for 350,000 persons in the rest of the country. Practically at the same time WFP supplied 13,000 tons of food to 300,000 refugees in Kukes, Albania, April 1999 (in the first month of the Kosovo emergency). With a third of the country's total population displaced after a few weeks of fighting the emergency unfolding in Guinea-Bissau had potentials for a big international aid operation and people inside the country tried to alert the outside world. But the international aid industry had to fight an uphill battle with donors for three reasons. First the 'international community' had no geo-political reasons to intervene in Guinea-Bissau, except for France and Portugal competing for influence without humanitarian niceties through national diplomatic and military channels. Secondly there was almost no outflow of refugees to other countries meaning the emergency was contained without outside intervention. Thirdly there was no need for camps and little overall need for humanitarian assistance because the displaced persons were housed and fed by local people.

A discussion of the geo-political issues of the Guinea-Bissau conflict falls outside the scope of the present article (cf. Drift 2000, Gaillard 2000, Manley 1999) and little needs to be said here about the refugee issue. In their appeal to donors for an emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau WFP included an outflow of 50,000 refugees. But there never was a huge pressure of people trying to leave the country. While more than 350,000 persons were internally displaced less than 9,000 people left the country. (UNHCR statistical overview 1998-1999; UNHCR Country Profiles 1998) Why did WFP invent a caseload of 50,000 refugees? WFP had an agreement with UNHCR that refugee-caseloads below 5,000 were taken care of by UNHCR. Was it simply to secure the refugee business for the Programme? In any case, when WFP later claimed

that their intervention "prevented chaos and an outflow of refugees" (WFP Guinea-Bissau Donor Report 1999) it seems to be defending one spurious claim with a new one.

With a donor-community neither moved by geo-politics nor a refugee-scare the aid industry concentrated on the two staples of emergency operations: food and health. This passed the buck to WFP (health aid falls outside the scope of this article). But there was a problem. WFP had been evacuated from Bissau.

WFP evacuation from Bissau

A week after hostilities began UNSECOORD in New York declared Bissau too dangerous for UN personnel (Security Phase V) and WFP evacuated its international staff to Dakar while the international staff of some embassies and NGOs remained in Bissau. However WFP were allowed to position two officers in Bafata, the main inland town, to coordinate food distribution as the interior of the country only was classified Security Phase IV. WFP's exit was to be a major problem and embarresment for WFP. UN rules of security immobilized WFP completely in the part of Guinea-Bissau most affected by the war.

- WFP were forbidden to stay more than 24 hours in Bissau and only after prior security clearance from New York.
- WFP could not use the harbour of Bissau because WFP personnel could not be present at unloading.
- WFP could not purchase food in Bissau if it was imported and rice for sale in Bissau was all imported.
- WFP could not purchase food in Bissau also because WFP-rules demanded on the spot supervision of quaility and quantity, fumigation and packing in sacks printed with the WFP logo.

WFP had a well-qualified local staff in Bissau ; they were all dismissed when the the international staff left and all WFP activities immediately stopped. An OCHA-

delegation visited Bissau 30/9-1/10 and suggested UNSECOORD to lower the security classification to phase IV, however New York did not agree. Finally, after visits by new missions Bissau was lowered to phase IV with effect from December 8. Still it took WFP almost a month to move back to Bissau (January 4,1999).

The WFP commitment for an emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau

The UN quickly issued an Interim Appeal (June 30 1998), containing projects from a string of UN aid agencies with WFP proposing the largest operation. The appeal was very 'interim' and not based on detailed knowledge of the situation in Guinea-Bissau, but applied a general approach to emergencies, as if a few basic facts of Guinea-Bissau had been fed into a ready-made computer programme of how to deal with an average emergency. One week later (July 6) the government of Guinea-Bissau officially requested help from WFP to feed displaced persons and the population remaining in Bissau. But after presenting the Interim Appeal WFP moved very slowly. Only in late August, that is more than two months into the conflict, did WFP put together a commitment, i.e. a proper plan for an emergency operation and presented it to the government of Guinea-Bissau and donors (code-named EMOP 6033 GUB). During the six months from July to December 1998, WFP would mobilize 36.000 tons of food aid to 350.000 'internally displaced persons and victims of internal armed conflict'. WFP listed three objectives for their operation in Guinea-Bissau. "[T]o ensure that conflict affected people have access to sufficient amounts of food; to prevent deterioration of the nutritional status and reduce malnutrition rates among vulnerable groups, mainly woman and children; to prevent mass refugee population out of Guinea-Bissau to the neighboring countries of Senegal, Gambia, Cape Verde and Guinea Conakry." The total project amounted to USD 22 million, a sum equal to Guinea-Bissau's total export earnings in the year before the war.

The figure of 350.000 displaced persons became the key parameter for the whole operation and was based on the near-total vacation of the population of Bissau. "Vulnerable groups, mainly woman and children" was a simple add-on of standard WFP target groups. No reflection on how these target groups overlapped with that of displaced persons were made by WFP. The figure of 35.000 tons of food was based on full rations to all 350.000 IDPs for the planned six-month duration of the operation. This was totally unrealistic in terms of donor response and ignored completely what local resources could contribute. It also, perhaps more importantly, disregarded any possible negative impact of such full-scale feeding upon the local community. These problems could not be heeded by using a standard manual for emergency operations. WFP inflexibility was to plunge the whole operation into a prolonged and unresolved conflict with local actors.

The donors: making food available 1

Donor money went to the big professional actors in the aid industry. Yet WFP had remarkable little luck in persuading donors. By the end of August 1998, only a single pledge from Sweden had been received in response to the UN appeal. As of November 11, 1998, Guinea-Bissau had received pledges for humanitarian assistance for around 17 million USD; of this sum 14 million USD was pledged to the UN Inter Agency Appeal for Guinea-Bissau 1998. The dominance of WFP was overwhelming; it received pledges for 11 million USD, or more than three times as many as all other agencies combined. The only problem with these pledges was that most of them remained figures on a piece of paper until the war had practically ended. None of the food that entered the country during 1998 was donated to the Guinea-Bissau emergency operation, but borrowed from other WFP operations. When the pledged food finally did arrive in 1999 nine months after WFP sent out the appeal for an emergency operation the emergency was over. Only in August 1999, more than a year after the emergency began and several months after it ended, had WFP received the variety of food, the full basket stock, planned in the original commitment to the Guinea-Bissau emergency. It was slow even

by the long average lead time of 4-6 months in WFP emergency operations. (CMI 1993:99)

Rice donated by Switzerland cost 630 USD/ton and rice donated by Sweden and bought by WFP on the worldmarket cost on average 621 USD/ton. The rice purchased for Swedish money in Bissau only cost 2100 French Franc or 320 USD/ton (at a FF rate of 6,5 to the dolllar). The rice purchased in Bissau during the conflict by WFP was not locally produced but imported commercially from Vietnam, Pakistan and China. Both prices included transport to Bissau and other expenses. It is surprising that the WFP food was so much more expensive. For the same amount of money SIDA was able to feed twice as many people with rice bought in Guinea-Bissau as with rice bought, administrated and shipped by WFP.

WFP stocks in the area: making food available 2

WFP was not able to get any food into the primary emergency location by air, land or sea for more than six months. No food was air-lifted, only a small amount came by road in January 1999, and practically all the food that was shipped to the port of Bissau arrived in April 1999 and later. By a lucky coincidence WFP had already food in the area: 2.500 tons in Bissau stored for WFP development projects and large stocks in the region for emergency operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Some consignments for these operations were transferred to Conakry and loaded onto trucks, travelling overland to Bafata, the main town in interior of Guinea-Bissau. This 840 km long mountainous route could handle a maximum of 500 tons a week. A total of 6.392 tons of food came in from Conakry during the war.

WFP also had stocks closer to Guinea-Bissau in Gambia and Senegal. But Senegal denied access of humanitarian aid to Guinea-Bissau in its struggle against the Casamance rebels in southern Senegal. The Senegalese government went out of the way

to prevent food reaching Junta Militar areas. For all practical purposes they managed to prevent WFP transferring food from stocks in Senegal and they almost blocked transit from Gambia to Guinea-Bissau on the Senegalese-Guinean border. WFP and others agencies like MSF protested to the government in Dakar but with little effect. The first convoy of seven trucks arrived September 23 after a week of harrassment at the border by the Senegalese army. This obstruction was repeated with the subsequent three convoys. A total of 2.280 tons of food came from Banjul overland via Senegal to Bafata during the war. The isolation of Bissau in terms of food supplies was almost total from June 1998 through March 1999. The food made available for emergency distribution in Bissau was all imported before the war: 2.500 tons by WFP, 1.300 tons by local traders and 1.312 tons by other agencies. During 1998 no food reached Bissau from the regions and only 347 tons of food was distributed from Bissau to the regions.

WFP purchasing food in Bissau: making food available 3

The main development in the international response to the emergency during 1998 was that heavy pressure from certain NGOs, donor countries and ECHO finally made WFP put the needs of Bissau's population before agency rules and purchase food available on the market in Bissau.

In the middle of September WFP stocks were exhausted and distribution ceased. Throughout September and October the national aid-coordination committee kept pressurizing WFP to buy food locally. "The problem is not the food but to get someone to pay for it" as one member of the committee said. The Swedish Embassy could inform WFP that traders in Bissau had more than 10.000 tons in stock. In a meeting with WFP resident representative Hiro Matsumura on 30 September 1998, Swedish charge d'affaire Ulla Andrén emphasized her concern that WFP only had been able to distribute 5.430 tons during three months, out of the target of 36.670 tons for July-December. It could clearly dent the corporate image of WFP if it became widely known that a large

population was completely cut off from supplies due to inflexible rules designed to protect UN expatriate personnel. All this came to a head with the renewed fighting and a new wave of displaced persons in October 1998. By the end of October, after five weeks without distribution in Bissau and a short war, Danida donated money to ECHO/Dan Church Aid for local purchase of 400 tons of rice. ECHO was eager to show that they could make food available where WFP stalled. WFP could no longer withstand the pressure. Hiro Matsumura budged, saying "this is not normal WFP practice". Sweden donated money to WFP for 300 tons of rice, and later USA donated money for the purchase of 1000 tons of rice in Bissau. Peter Aaby director of Bandim Health Project, identified traders in Bissau on behalf of WFP and bought the first 300 tons of rice, distributed in Bissau, Prabis, Cumura and Safim from Nov 2. In total 1.700 tons of rice was bought in Bissau to be distributed as food aid. This rice was only half the price of the rice brought in by WFP.

When WFP returned to Bissau early January 1999 the stock was practically empty again, but no more food was purchased on the private market. WFP insisted that Bissau had to wait for the arrival of food in the 'pipeline'. It is not clear if this was because WFP did not want to spend cash on the operation in Guinea-Bissau or it believed the arrival of food was imminent. Despite presence on the ground and a new wave of displacement after the February fighting WFP only got 441 tons of food into Bissau and 687 tons into the regions in the period January – February 1999. The period March-May 1999 was, except for two days of fighting early May, a post-war period and WFP got 7.189 tons into Bissau and 1.772 tons into the regions. In total WFP imported 16.302 tons of food into Guinea-Bissau during the twelve month period, June 1998 – May 1999. WFP made more than 93% of all food aid available in Guinea-Bissau. With the 2.500 tons stored by WFP in Bissau and 1.300 tons bought locally by WFP, and 1.312 made available by other agencies, a total 21.414 tons food was available for distribution.

Who distributed the food?

The Comité Nacional de Solidaridade e Ajuda Humanitária,

The sudden evacuation of WFP from Bissau by default gave the government a unique opportunity to control the aid process. Immediately after WFP evacuated Bissau on June 15 1998, the well-reputed Minister of Health Dr. Brandao Gomes Co took control of the WFP food stocks in Bissau. He declared that until the return of WFP the Ministry of Health would assume responsibility for the management and distribution of the food. Secondly, he also took the initiative to form the so-called Comité de Ajuda Humanitária de Urgência (CAHU) under his chairmanship to coordinate humanitarian assistance, bringing together experts from his ministry with certain NGOs, embassies and religious bodies active in social and health work. After the first cease-fire it was re-organized September 1998 on a national scale with 9 sub-committees in the regions as Comité Nacional de Solidaridade e Ajuda Humanitária or Comité Nacional for short. An important decision by the committee was to distribute available food in several small rations to all needy people. This was a flexible approach that could follow the very mobile population. WFP in the regions distributed in standard full rations, but since food was in short supply it took five months to reach all localities with this rigid procedure (some never received food), and the original censuses became useless as many people moved. WFP came back to Bissau on January 4, 1999, and two weeks later the national committee formally returned the national responsibility for food aid to WFP. In March 1999 the Comité Nacional was divided into sub-committees. March 5 a food-group was formed, meeting, symbolically, in the WFP office. The conflict between the committee and WFP is reviewed in Part Four below.

The NGOs

While most of the aid organisations in private probably hoped the Junta Militar would win and put an end to Nino Veira's rule, on a practical level they supported the committee in order to get access to the population. As in other emergency operations

WFP supplied food but did not distribute it. NGOs, churches etc. signed Memoranda of Understanding with Comité Nacional in Bissau and with WFP in Bafata and then received food for distribution according to a census of beneficiaries in their area. In Bissau the first organizations to undertake distribution of food aid were the national Red Cross, Catholic Missions, the Bandim Health Project and *Cooperação Portuguesa*, all coordinated by the Comité Nacional. They all were well-established organisations with long-running local aid operations and strong links to outside resources. During the early period of fighting and dislocation June to September 1998, 725 tons of food was distributed in Bissau: 38% by Red Cross, 38% by churches, and 24% by NGOs and hospitals.

In Bafata distribution of the food supplied by WFP was mainly done by ICRC/national Red Cross and by ADPP (*Ajuda Desenvolvimento Povo a Povo*) a subsidiary of the Danish worldwide school and charity company *Skolesamvirket Tvind*. For several years prior to the war ADPP had ran development projects including cashew-plantations and sale of second-hand clothes in the interior of Guinea-Bissau. ADPP kept substantial quantities of food in their warehouse in Gabu and began distributing food in early July. ICRC was by far the most rapid reacting of the big international humanitarian agencies. They managed to submit an emergency appeal, secure funding and dispatch two international emergency staff to Bafata within one week of the onset of fighting. Other distributors were the Evangelical church and Caritas. Of the 4.218 tons of food distributed July-December 1998 from the WFP warehouse in Bafata ADPP managed 46% and ICRC a little less with 42%; the Evangelical church and Caritas divided the rest with 7% and 5% respectively.

Many small NGOs, churches and other organisations entered the field of food aid distribution when WFP returned in January 1999. However several international organisations including Caritas and ICRC had phased out general food distributions

already late 1998 and stopped after February 1999 because they estimated there was no longer any general food insecurity. Instead they moved to reconstruction, in particular of destroyed private houses in Bissau. This activity, later also undertaken by other agencies such as BHP, mostly consisted of donating building materials. It swallowed up large funds, led to a lot of elbowing by would-be beneficiaries and resentment by those that did not receive new tin-roofs and other materials.

The Junta Militar

Most of the population probably supported the Junta Militar, at least in order to get rid of Nino. Thus the Junta did not need citizens as Nino did, neither to gain credibility as a government nor as a shield against attacks on their military positions. This, ironically, meant that the Junta Militar did not have to care much for the population and they returned the support of the population by ignoring their needs for aid. The Swedish charge d'affaire Ulla Andréén, openly sympathetic to the Junta Militar, reported that "The JM has shown no interest to take part in the work of distributing humanitarian aid. They mistrust the national committee, chaired by the Minister of Health, and do not believe he sticks to objective criteria of distribution. But in the areas of which they are in full military control, i.e. most of the country, they have not even bothered to participate in the regional committees or to organize or set up any distribution themselves." (Promemoria 1998-09-20, p.4; translated from Swedish) This of course did not mean the Junta did not eat food aid nor use medical aid, only that they had little political use of the aid.

How much food aid did the population receive?

For people the food was only important when they got it in their hands. Table 1 presents the performance of the food aid intervention. The total distribution in the eleven months of conflict June 7 1998– May 7 1999 was around 10.500 tons (including distribution carried out after the conflict ended in June 1999 as WFP does the figure rises to 14.967

tons). This is far less than the food available according to the same sources. Most of the difference is simply stock: by May 31 1999, WFP had accumulated a stock of 5.290 tons of food in Guinea-Bissau.

WFP did not control what happened to the food once it had left the warehouse. They did not control discrepancies between reported and real numbers of beneficiaries, or whether every beneficiary got a little less than the kilos he should have etc. etc. Obviously the system was not insured against corruption, and from anecdotal evidence this seems to have been a big problem. All distributors and recipients interviewed by the present author insisted that irregularities, for example distributing agencies presenting census figures systematically set too high relative to the actual number of beneficiaries, giving food to friends, important connections and the military, or beneficiaries moving around to obtain several rations, was widespread and persistent. Yet, in the WFP reporting this is hidden in the distribution figures. The actual magnitude of corruption remains unknown, but it is hard to take the WFP claim of 0,8% theft, loss and corruption seriously. (WFP Guinea-Bissau Monthly Distribution Tables 1998-99)

Distribution was on average 31,3 tons per day or 78-104 grams of food for each of the 300- 400.000 beneficiaries for 335 days. The table reveals the highly erratic distribution. Only once did rations reach even the minimum WFP ration (in Bissau in May 1999 after the war had ended), but for months rations were zero or less than 20 grams per day (October 1998 and April 1999 in Bissau and November 1998 and January 1999 in the regions). Distribution peaked in the aftermath of the fighting periods: the Comité Nacional had distribution running in July 1998 while WFP was one month behind in the regions peaking in August and September 1998. After the second war in October there was no food aid left in Bissau, and only after much pressure did WFP buy local food, distributed from November 1998. In 1999 conflict and attention focused on Bissau with little food distributed in the regions. Two distributions were carried out in Bissau after

the third war in February. This was the last distribution of food in response to emergency needs. By far the largest distribution was in May and June 1999 after the conflict when there was no longer any emergency need, but carried out because WFP had received large quantities of food. Although no-one was starving WFP could not defend accumulating an enormous stock in the middle of an officially ongoing emergency operation.

Table 1.
Food aid distributed in Guinea-Bissau June 7 1998-June 30 1999

	Bissau-Biombo Tons	Tons/day	Grams/Beneficiaries per day	Bafata-Regions Tons	Tons/day	Grams/Beneficiaries per day
June a)	416	15,4	119 /130.000	0	0	0/310.000
July b)	435	11,7	145 /130.000	317	10,2	32/310.000
Aug c)	195	13,9	93 /150.000	1.382	44,6	154/290.000
Sep d)	706	15,6	78 /200.000	1.153	38,4	160/240.000
Oct e)	0	0	0 /150.000	954	30,7	106/290.000
Nov f)	586	18,9	82 /230.000	93	3,1	18/170.000
Dec g)	885	32,8	143 /230.000	265	8,5	50/170.000
Jan	205	6,6	26/250.000	67	2,2	13/170.000
Feb	1.002	35,8	143/250.000	474	16,9	99/170.000
March	472	15,2	56/270.000	416	13,4	89/150.000
April	80	2,7	10/270.000	142	4,7	36/130.000
May	2.864	92,4	342/270.000	434	14	127/110.000
June	1.280	42,7	158/270.000	144	4,8	53/90.000
Total	9.126	23,1	92/250.000	5.841	14,8	99/150.000

Source: Quantities for Bissau-Biombo 1998: Comité Nacional; Quantities for the regions 1998 and Guinea-Bissau 1999: WFP. Numbers of beneficiaries are author's estimates.

NB: Reporting periods for Bissau-Biombo 1998 are: a) June 7 – July 4 (27 days); b) July 5 – 28 (23 days); c) July 29 - Aug 12 (14 days); d) Aug 13 – Sep 28 (46 days); e) Sep 29 – Nov 1 (33 days); f) Nov 2 – Dec 3 (31 days); g) Dec 4 – 31 (27 days)

The extensions of the WFP emergency operation

Despite the huge quantities of food available in May-June 1999 general free distribution could not be justified after June 1999. WFP conceded it "could destabilize fragile local market and create widespread sale of the food aid." (Guinea-Bissau Donor Report 1999)

June 1999 WFP shifted to "post crisis rehabilitation approach" and "support to the most vulnerable population affected by the conflict" and then prolonged the emergency operation for another year. This was the second extension, first from December 1998 to July 1999, and now to July 2000. But in fact the new projects looked very much like the development projects they had been running for many years in Guinea-Bissau up to the

war, including assistance to for malnourished children and lactating women in nutritional centres and hospitals, training women in simple "income-generating skills", school feeding, food for work programmes for rehabilitation of fields and roads etc. Whether it was called emergency operation, rehabilitation or development it had little to do with nutritional needs as such, but with supply, i.e. when the food was there WFP could always design a project and get the food distributed after some time. During the first six months of 2000 WFP distributed 5.087 tons of food to 90.171 beneficiaries. In other words, WFP continued to distribute large amounts of food but now in much larger rations to fewer people than during the emergency.

July 2000 WFP put yet another name on their food distribution in Guinea-Bissau, now it was called a "prolonged recovery and rehabilitation operation" with a planned duration of 18 months. It was presented with the then-current donor plus-words: "Concentrating on supporting the reconciliation and reconstruction efforts of the government in assisting the most vulnerable groups of the population, addressing the need for agricultural reactivation, reintegration of de-mobilized soldiers and in particular reopening and regular school functioning." (Guinea-Bissau Donor Report 1999) Nevertheless the WFP 'Food Aid Needs and Shortfall Table' as of August 31, 2000 advertised a shortfall of 10.000 tons of food for their 'assistance to 350.000 war victims' in Guinea-Bissau. (www.wfp.org/guinea_bissau/requirements.asp) The operation had become a self-propelling fund-generating undertaking completely divorced from actual needs on the ground. One wonders how many other WFP operations are like that.

3/ WFP: AVERTING A FAMINE?

WFP claimed that "WFP managed to...avert the famine situation in the country" (Donor Report Guinea-Bissau, 1998) and "WFP's immediate response.. averted famine and

starvation.” (Donor Report Guinea-Bissau,1999) But does this assertion hold water? Available information on the nutritional impact of the food aid is rudimentary and does not permit more than a discussion of the average impact of the total food aid. Of course, certain groups received more and others less than the average, but without data –one exemption is mentioned below – a more detailed assessment is hardly justified.

Table 2 below makes clear the limited contribution of food aid to the total amount of available food. According to CILSS, a committee monitoring food security for FAO in the Sahel region (Guinea-Bissau was included in the 1980s for reasons of food aid politics), 14.490 tons food aid was imported Nov 1 1997-Oct 31 1999, (2.000 tons lower than the WFP figure). During the war local production of food only dropped 13%, and rice production actually increased 8% because many of the displaced persons took part in rice cultivation in the villages where they found shelter. It is also noteworthy that commercial food import was 5 to 10 times higher than food aid import. The 1998/99 import was particular high because a quantity of cashew-nuts which could not be sold in June 1998 because of the war was bartered for imported rice in 1999. None of these figures indicate a famine-like break-down of food-security.

Table 2.

Food production and food import in Guinea-Bissau 1997/98/99/00; tons

Harvest year 1Nov/31 Oct	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
Production			
Rice	80.700	87.200	80.300
Other	64.700	44.100	58.400
Total production	145.400	131.300	138.700
Total available after deduction for seeds etc.	103.000	89.800	97.800
Stock initial	14.500	0	5.800
Commercial import	40.500	54.529	46.800
Export	0	0	0
Food aid	3.500	10.990	6.680
Total available food	161.500	155.319	157.080
Proportion of food aid of available food	2,2 %	7,1 %	4,3 %

Source: CILSS; 1998, 1999, 2000

Local food consumption and food aid

We do not know the precise food consumption during the eleven months of conflict June 7 1998-May 7 1999. For the present purposes it is assumed to be 11/12 of the average of the consumption calculated by CILSS for 1998 and 1999, approximately 143.000 tons. Food aid contributed 10.500 tons of the total or around 7,5%. (Cf. Table1) Table 3 below indicates how much energy the food aid contributed for the average person in Guinea-Bissau. The 10.500 tons of food aid was composed of 90% cereals and 10% oil, and increased on average the available daily energy 100 kcal from 1.330 to 1.430 kcal per day per person. In terms of averting a famine that is a very small amount.

Table 3.
Food consumption and food aid in Guinea-Bissau 1997/98/99/00

Harvest year 1Nov/31 Oct	1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000
Population	1.112.000	1.134.000	1.157.000
National consumption	161.500 tons	150.385 tons	153.080 tons
Average consumption Day/person a)	400 grams 1.500 kcal	363 grams 1.360 kcal	362 grams 1.360 kcal
Aid consumed	7.387 tons b)	2.858 tons c)	10.286 tons d)
Aid % of consumption	7,8 % e)	5,7 % f)	6,7 % g)
Aid contribution to Average consumption	117 kcal day/person	78 kcal day/person	91 kcal day/person

Source: CILSS; 1998, 1999, 2000; WFP Guinea-Bissau

- a) Equivalent of 90% rice and 10% oil. Nutritional values calculated from WHO 2000:194
- b) Total food aid distributed June-December 1998; cf. Table 1
- c) Total food aid distributed Jan-April 1999; cf. Table 1
- d) Food aid distributed Jan-Dec 1999; WFP-figure
- e) % of Jun-Dec 1998 consumption
- f) % of Jan-April 1999 consumption
- g) % of Nov 1999-Oct 2000 consumption

Guinea-Bissau: no famine reported nor averted

The average consumption before, during, and after the war (cf. Table 3) was still below the WHO/FAO full ration of 2.080 kcal per person per day. (WHO 2000:142) Of course, certain groups may have received more and some less than the average ration, but except for isolated pockets of malnutrition no hunger was recorded by nutritionists monitoring the situation in Guinea-Bissau. ICRC reported one month into the conflict when no international aid had yet reached the population, "the situation is not altogether alarming." (ICRC Update on activities in Guinea, 98/ 03, July 6, 1998) The co-ordinator for the protestant relief agency ACT reporting on the situation one month later, 3 aug 1998, stated that, "the food situation is not considered critical, but people have no money to buy food". WFP commissioned a nutritional survey in December 1998. The report indicated "no significant malnutrition in either IDPs nor local population, despite a reduced overall food availability". (WFP Donor Report 1999) Only some pockets of malnutrition were identified along the border with Senegal.

Nutritional impact of short-term operations are notoriously difficult to assess partly because of poor data collected under chaotic conditions, partly because the nutritional impact of food aid seldom is long-term but only constitutes a minor part of a highly

variable food intake. Suitable indicators are not always easy to establish. Arm-circumference, mortality of children under two years and household food intake were used as indicators in the only published study of nutrition during the Guinea-Bissau emergency. It suggests that local resources secured sufficient nutrition, while food aid played an insignificant role. Studying a group of 422 children aged 9-23 months in 30 clusters in Prabis from July to September 1998, it was concluded that "there has been no major deficiency in rice consumption for the population of Prabis...Only a minor proportion of the rice consumption can be ascribed to food aid which did not contribute more than 50-150 g per person per day throughout the period." and the study concluded, "No direct connection was found between household rice consumption and nutritional status of young children in a situation without hunger and starvation." (Aaby 1999:4)

The performance of WFP in Guinea-Bissau has been documented above. The agency never fulfilled its commitment to distribute 36.000 tons of food July-December 1998, neither in time nor in volume. Eventually 10.500 tons were distributed during the eleven month conflict, or 7 % of the total food consumption of the Guinean population in this period. The over-all nutritional impact was relatively insignificant, and no famine can be documented to have been averted by the WFP emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau.

4/ WFP UNDERMINING LOCAL COPING

The solidarity of residents and displaced persons

Perhaps the most challenging lesson for international humanitarians of the Guinea response to the emergency was how well most people in need coped without international assistance. In an analysis of the emergency one of Guinea-Bissau's most respected social scientists concluded: «The internal solidarity among the population ranks among the principal factors that softened the suffering of the population during

the war, in particular for the group of displaced. This interpretation is valid for the whole period of the conflict, but in particular for the first months, when every-one assisted every-one independent of what type of relations that existed between these persons.» (Jau 2000:116) The solidarity was truly remarkable. People survived because food resources in the country were shared. Enough local crops and commercial imports were shared by relatives and to a lesser extent between strangers to keep the displaced third of the population alive. A woman remaining during the whole war in Bissau explained how it was commercially imported food and sharing that kept people alive.

“I only received food aid once, in August or September but when there was a cease-fire people could buy rice. Some traders came and sold things and you could go out and buy. Close to my house I bought sugar, oil, and butter. I could get everything, but the prices were very high. It was the miracle of this war because even in the shortest cease-fires you could go out and buy things to keep you alive. People survived for months but not because they had reserves. It was a question of the social relations between Guineans. Because if you are my neighbour and I eat, and you want to eat and you have no money, then I give you food. No one was really hungry, we have the proverb: *Bianda kusido ka tem duno*: a cooked meal has no owner.” (High-school teacher, living alone with her daughter in the Cuntum bairro in the outskirts of Bissau. Interviewed in Bissau November 24, 2000. Translated from *kriolu*)

The solidarity between hosts and displaced was the core of the local coping mechanism. Residents in their private homes shared space, shelter and food with people that had fled fighting. The crowding was dramatic in villages around Bissau. All the food aid that the displaced received was pooled with all food in the house as a matter of normal politeness and shared by everyone staying together for the moment.

Comité Nacional and WFP : conflict over resident hosts

But this type of sharing was not in the WFP book of emergencies. WFP knew in advance only IDPs were in need of food assistance. Confronted with contradictory local realities WFP just insisted that rules and regulations carried more weight than local coping mechanisms, as they explain very straight-forwardly in the Donor Report for Guinea-Bissau 1998 :

"Due to the socio-cultural background, all the IDPs were accommodated at the hosting families. Thus it was very difficult for the local NGOs to identify who the IDPs were... Since there were no camps and/or centres for the IDPs in the country, all the beneficiaries were under asylum of their relatives or friends in the interior of the country. This causes tremendous misunderstandings that the hosting families demanded their entitlement to request food assistance." WFP continues, "WFP continued explaining through the National Committee on Humanitarian Assistance and NGOs on the WFP's targeted beneficiaries. Due to the frequent movement of the IDPs caused by the several conflicts, it was not possible to keep registering the number in accordance with the category of Vulnerable groups. Meanwhile some NGOs were harassed by the local population on why the hosting families or the whole population were not entitled to receiving food assistance... As per WFP's beneficiaries criteria, only IDPs were in dire need of food assistance".

But the Comité Nacional argued it was impossible and unjustified to distinguish between IDPs and hosts as every bit of food aid would be shared in the extended families. Tony Pires was one of the key members of the Comité Nacional, responsible for the distribution of food aid. He commented on this disagreement (Interview conducted in Bissau October 20, 1998, in English):

"WFP was the only one to have this idea. Everyone was against it... In the committee we decided to do what the government wants, not what the WFP wants. The problem

was that all over the world, WFP had never seen that a national committee made decisions about how to distribute. But we told them: you are not in here, since you have left Bissau some other people have to take care of people. They never agreed with the committee. They wanted to rule themselves, but they are not here, when the war started they just left.”

In Bafata the situation was more difficult because WFP was present and the agencies had to distribute according to WFP criteria. On November 7, for example, the regional Comité Nacional coordinator requested permission to distribute food to the whole population in Gabu town numbering 32.000 people. WFP declined this, saying, "Since this does not tally with WFP's objectives of targeting only the most vulnerable population, WFP has refused the operation." (WFP sit. rep. 17/98 3-9/11/98) The unwise lack of flexibility displayed by WFP caused violent local protests. Tony Pires remembered, "Even the WFP representative in Bafata knew the problem. Red Cross went to distribute to people and they had some problems because people picked up stones and said they must leave the place because they cannot distribute only to the refugees [IDPs]."

The main international response to the emergency in Guinea-Bissau came from WFP, but with remarkable insensitivity to existing social structures. WFP actively undermined the two most important local coping mechanisms: the grass-roots solidarity of extended families and the national aid-coordination committee. In the Donor Report for Guinea-Bissau WFP made it clear that they regarded the local state institutions including the committee as "dysfunctional": the Comité Nacional "did not function in practice" and "WFP is implementing the operation without Government inputs of any kind or support".

WFP-Guinea-Bissau's unimaginative response to the no-refugees-in-camps type of emergency even did not reflect documented WFP experiences elsewhere in Africa utilizing a less rigid understanding of 'displaced persons'. A major evaluation of WFP noted already in 1993 that in Ethiopia 'existing social structures' were used successfully for distribution to Somali refugees in order to minimize the need for camps. "In some cases the so-called Cross Mandate approach was applied, permitting distribution to both refugee and non-refugee members of local communities." (CMI 1993 :102) It is also important to note that epidemiological research from Guinea-Bissau suggests that hosts had a higher mortality than guests (Aaby et. al. 1999) because their immunity to the diseases brought by the displaced persons were poorer than that of the displaced themselves, further questioning the belief that in the context of refugees hosted privately, the displaced person *per se* is more vulnerable than the host.

Families hosting refugees: a new class of vulnerable persons of concern to humanitarian aid

Before the emergency had ended in Guinea-Bissau the humanitarian internationals were confronted again with this new group of vulnerable persons in a completely different location: in Albania 285.000 refugees were hosted by private families in April 1999. The dynamics of a non-camp, local response to an emergency is only beginning to be studied. The evaluation of UNHCR's response to the Kosovo crisis (Suhrke 2000) made it clear how inadequate the standard aid-tools were to assist a widely dispersed group of IDPs and even more so their hosts in private homes. "The mixture of the economically motivated involvement and the generosity of the Albanian population in their response, combined with the relative wealth of many of the refugees who were able to pay for accomodation and food, were arguably the most significant factors in avoiding a potential crisis." (ibid p. 67) In Guinea-Bissau the pressure on the resident population were much heavier than in Albania. The ratio of displaced persons to the total population was 1:10 in Albania but as high as 1:3 in Guinea-Bissau. Moreover, the

duration of the emergency was longer, the resources of the refugees/IDPs relatively smaller and the international assistance incomparably much smaller. Thus Guinea-Bissau offers an important example of large-scale humanitarian assistance successfully mobilised by the war-affected population itself.

5/ CONCLUSION

In this article two questions have been asked. Did the WFP emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau 1998-99 avert a famine – as claimed by WFP? And did the WFP emergency operation strengthen local coping mechanisms - as WFP declares emergency operations should do? The negative answers to both questions presented in the article may be put into perspective by briefly considering whether the displaced and war-affected population of Guinea-Bissau would have benefited if WFP had implemented the emergency operation on time and in full volume as planned. WFP had committed itself to distribute 36.000 tons of food July through December 1998. With only 7.300 tons of food distributed July-December 1998 the WFP emergency operation in Guinea-Bissau fell short of its own goal. But if this goal had been achieved, had the population of Guinea-Bissau benefitted?

Impact on survival not by averting a famine but by influencing movement

There was never reported any general starvation or famine in Guinea-Bissau. No beneficiaries got all or even most of their nutrition covered by the food aid. Food aid amounted to 7 % of the population's total food consumption and did not avert a famine. Indeed food aid was not the most urgent need of the population. What the population needed urgently, in particular in Bissau, was safety from the armed violence, a cease-fire and a lasting peace. People responded to the emergency primarily by moving. Moving out of the city reduced the risk of casualties from fighting, but it also exposed people to new dangers, primarily infections. People were highly mobile and repeatedly changed

location according to how fighting, food availability, shelter, health, family-relations, and the ever-present spirits might influence security.

In this situation food aid took on an ambiguous function. In September 1998 the Bandim Health Project and the committee argued that continued distribution in the regions slowed down the return to Bissau. It was assumed that the location of food distribution was a major pull-factor in the displacement/return of refugees. Secondly it was assumed, and subsequently documented, that the risk of infections were much higher in the cramped, unhygienic conditions most displaced lived under. A counter-argument against return, not considered to outweigh the other concerns, was that no-one could guarantee that Bissau would be safe. Indeed most of the returnees would flee again within six weeks from renewed fighting. The Bandim Health Project is currently investigating the complex mortality and morbidity patterns of the Bissau population during the war. A final result is still not published, but preliminary results indicate that food aid did not impact mortality and morbidity through nutrition. Arguably the key manner in which food aid had an impact on people's survival was by influencing their movement.

The benefit of failure ?

Today it is obvious that the claim made during the emergency that if a full ration of 400 grams to half of the total Guinean population was not available it could mean "starvation for 100.000s of suffering Guineans" was far too pessimistic. (Ulla Andréén to WFP in September 1998) With hardly any malnutrition in the first place the extra 30.000 tons of food planned for 1998 could not have solved a nutritional problem. The 350.000 war-affected and displaced persons in Guinea-Bissau never depended on food aid for survival because there was food in the country. To a very large extent they managed to get food by individual perseverance and the solidarity of other families. Those fleeing Bissau gained access to local food crops, while those remaining in Bissau depended on

imported food. Their survival depended on non-displaced families sharing the available food (and shelter) with them. With a six-fold increase in distribution it is likely that WFP would have been in a stronger position to insist on their own rules and even more comprehensively refuse distribution of food aid to host families.

The situation envisaged by WFP with all nutrition covered by aid for 350.000 displaced persons would have implied camp-like distribution if at all possible. The improvisation, flexibility and solidarity displayed by a great part of the Guineans would probably not have occurred had the international humanitarians swiftly provided large-scale assistance for example by establishing camps. Camps tend to create their own needs, be hard to close and distort the local food economy. The Safim Mission outside Bissau established the only camp-like shelter for displaced in Guinea-Bissau. Big rations created crowding of long duration and the mission experienced problems of dependency and break-down of solidarity that could only be solved by closing down the food distribution eventually. Full-scale WFP food aid could have substituted successful local survival with non-sustainable external aid.

An input of 36.000 tons of free food, equal to the total commercial import, would have caused disruptions of the local food economy. The dangers outlined by WFP of continued general distribution in June 1999 are relevant also for the hypothetical 'full WFP' situation. With huge quantities of food available, general free distribution was not considered justifiable, as it "could destabilize fragile local market and create widespread sale of the food aid." (WFP Guinea-Bissau Donor Report 1999) Experience from other civil wars suggests that large inputs of food aid feed into the war-economies and often prolong conflicts. (Cf. Waal 1997)

Finally would the aid have reached all in need? There was nothing in the WFP commitment or in the actual performance of WFP that would suggest they could have

solved the internal UN problem of security rating. Thus WFP had no idea of how to bring food to Bissau, and bringing all 36.000 tons into the Junta Militar controled regions would have been politically and humanely unacceptable and complicating the political situation and possibly prolonging the conflict.

For WFP the bottom-line was not without importance: they managed to keep a largely unnecessary operation in a very small country running for two years, seamlessly bridging food aid before, during and after the war, and adding more than 11 million dollars to the global turn-over of WFP. For the people, the beneficiaries, the intervention ignored all local resources. Had the displaced and needy people of Guinea-Bissau depended on WFP for all their food, as WFP assumed they did, they would certainly not have avoided a famine.

Thus in conclusion, there are valid reasons to believe the population of Guinea-Bissau had the benefit of WFP failure. They did not suffer because WFP performed poorly, on the contrary they were spared the negative impact likely to have followed a full-scale WFP operation. On the other hand, the Guineans that did receive WFP-food were happy. Where, in the final analysis, was the breaking point between beneficial and harmful impact: was it 5.000 tons, 15.000 tons or perhaps 0 tons of international food aid? That cannot be answered here. The evidence from Guinea-Bissau suggests that tonnage was only part of the answer. Chance institutional independence as that caused by WFP evacuation was important, and above all the unique capacity of the population of Guinea-Bissau to cater for the needs of their displaced and war-affected compatriots.

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