

CEP Magazine – May 2018 Meet Jamie Watts

An interview by Adam Turteltaub

Jamie Watts (jamie.watts@wfp.org) was interviewed in April of 2018 by Adam Turteltaub (adam.turteltaub@corporatecompliance.org), Vice President, Strategic Initiatives and International Programs, at SCCE, based out of Minneapolis.

Jamie Watts, Senior Compliance & Risk Advisor, World Food Programme, Dakar, Senegal

AT: Let me start with the basics. Could you give us an overview of the World Food Programme's work?

JW: The World Food Programme (WFP) is a United Nations (UN) agency whose objective is to fight hunger worldwide as a key player in the international commitment to end hunger and achieve food security and improved nutrition. One in nine people worldwide do not get enough to eat, and food-related assistance is an important factor in breaking the cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

Annually, WFP distributes approximately 12.6 billion rations to about 80 million people in 80 countries. WFP focuses on emergency assistance, relief, and rehabilitation; development aid; and special operations (for instance, providing air support for the humanitarian community in places where there is no commercial air service). Two-thirds of WFP's work is in conflict-affected countries where people are three times more likely to be undernourished than those living in countries without conflict. WFP is considered one of the world's leaders in emergency humanitarian response, providing food assistance quickly at a large scale to the neediest people in the most difficult environments.

AT: Your responsibilities cover the West Africa Regional Bureau, but that's a huge swath of land. What are some of the countries and key challenges there?

JW: Our region covers from Central African Republic to the southeast; northward to Chad; across Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Mauritania; and across the coastal countries from Senegal to Cameroon, and it includes the small island nation of São Tomé/Príncipe. It is one of the most interesting and diverse regions in the world, with a very rich cultural heritage, three main official languages (French, English, and Portuguese), and numerous local languages. The physical environments range from the deep Sahara desert across northern Niger, Chad, Mali, and Mauritania to the "Sahelian" desert edge to coastal and island environments, and it includes some of the most diverse tropical forests on the planet.

The region includes the largest economy in Africa, as well as some of the world's poorest and least developed countries. There are several major and long-running conflicts that have killed many people and caused serious and sustained disruption of people's livelihoods. The region is also affected by periodic natural disasters, notably drought and seasonal flooding. In addition to conflicts and natural disasters, the region is also faced with a number of other challenges that impact our operations, including limited private sector capacity, a number of supply chain obstacles for our food and cash-based programmes, and challenges to ensure WFP safely and effectively provides the right assistance to its beneficiaries.

It is tremendously challenging, and I am humbled to be able to work here. I spend a lot of time traveling across

the region to the deepest corners of where WFP works. Wherever you go, you see the people as extremely resilient and always seeking ways to sustain and bring themselves up, sometimes under almost impossibly difficult conditions. I am also privileged to work with WFP staff who are out on the front lines making a difference.

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