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# seminar report

## Implementation of United States Food Aid—Title III

### Introduction

In 1954, the United States Congress enacted PL 480, a statute authorizing a program of foreign food aid assistance which has since become a major component of U.S. foreign policy. The objectives of PL 480 were always multiple in character, but its programming emphasis has shifted over the years to reflect changes in U.S. agricultural conditions as well as changes within different recipient countries.

One thing that experience has demonstrated is that no food aid program, however well intentioned and well managed, can ever be entirely free of problems. On balance, most would agree, PL 480 has done more good than harm. It has also shown that there are fundamental contradictions and problems of administration in any approach to food aid.

The food-shortage drought period of 1973-1974 caused the sharpest changes in PL 480 in recent years. World attention focused on destitute people in poor countries and starvation deaths in the Sahel and Bangladesh.

It had long been obvious that food-surplus countries could not fully or for the indefinite future satisfy the requirements of food-deficit countries. Yet by the late 1970s the per capita availabilities of food in the world's poorest countries were still not improving and in some cases were actually getting worse. As a consequence of these events, there is a concern that all assistance programs, and especially food aid programs, be designed to promote rapid gains in agricultural production as well as increased food consumption.

In 1977, Title III of the PL 480 legislation established a "Food for Development" Program whose purpose was to give special emphasis to the food needs of poor people. An earlier "self-help" provision had already called for greater attention to agriculture. Other provisions had given preference to food-deficit poor countries in the allocation of PL 480 grains. The new Title III went further in directing that the program:

"increase the access of the poor in the recipient country to a growing and improving food supply through activities designed to improve the production, protection, and utilization of food and . . . increase the well-being of the poor in the rural sector of the recipient country."

Title III has already guided the form of several PL 480 country agreements, and this seminar was able to focus on means of using food for development. That is only one of the reasons for focusing at this time on some of the practical requirements. Congress is taking a greater interest in the subject now than would be suggested by the legislation alone. White House attention has also added a sense of urgency and even excitement as President Carter has moved to create a World Hunger Working Group and a World Hunger Commission.

The Research and Training Network, recognizing the significance of these food aid issues, sponsored this seminar which met on January 15-16, 1979, in Princeton, New Jersey. Participants were invited from governmental agencies responsible for U.S. food aid programming as well as from universities, international organizations, and voluntary agencies. Because the seminar was organized on short notice, it was not possible to include people from developing countries. A follow-up meeting in 1979 is being considered to involve them.

The participants at no time underestimated the difficulties of programming food aid so that it helps achieve development goals. Very broadly (and very briefly), the need is for strategies which directly enable poor people to satisfy essential food needs and which generate better opportunities for employment.

Food aid has successfully been used to promote developmental objectives, but food commodities bring with them several inherent constraints. Most participants expressed concern that so little is known about utilizing food (or any other form of assistance) to reach the growing numbers of tenant farmers and landless families. Participants again and again were

confronted by a major challenge: how to feed the poor and hungry while making longer term investments that lead to sustained development. The discussions at the seminar spurred the participants toward a recognition that we need to do a better job of dealing with this issue in the future.

Papers presented by seminar participants are listed in the agenda. This summary report incorporates ideas and suggestions raised during the meeting. The papers can be obtained by writing to the authors.

### **The Record of U.S. Food Aid**

The descriptions of experiences and the reports of available research which were reviewed in this two-day seminar give little support for any sweeping generalizations about the impact of past food aid programs. Variations in country setting have been great, food aid has been programmed in a variety of ways, and there has been great diversity in the quality of research aimed at analyzing these programs.

One factor that distinguishes today's PL 480 program from that of the 1950s and 1960s is the stage of development of the typical recipient country.

Those countries which were principal Title I recipients in the early days of PL 480 made effective use of U.S. commodities to feed people and put them to work; a number of encouraging "success stories" emerged from the period.

The newly independent countries of Asia, and to a lesser extent of Africa, which have been major recipients of food aid in the 1970s, do not appear to have as strong a capacity, in either their governmental or private sectors, to use food aid resources effectively for development goals. This means that food aid agreements must themselves be development oriented, which in turn requires improved country understandings. The main point is that effective food aid utilization depends on many factors.

The discussion of the history of PL 480 also indicated that PL 480 commodity levels have declined significantly as a proportion of total U.S. agricultural exports. This is a result both of higher total U.S. agricultural exports and of absolute declines in PL 480 exports. At the same time, the importance of food aid as an element of U.S. foreign assistance programs has grown; food now represents 20 to 25 percent of the nation's foreign assistance budget.

Country effects of food aid can be classified under the following headings:

#### *Effects on product prices and food production policies in the recipient country.*

In principle, food aid is supposed to be above and beyond regular commercial supplies. If it makes up a significant share of domestic consumption and if it is sold through regular commercial channels, however, it will certainly affect prices and incentives for domestic producers.

Additionally, it may enable governments to avoid directing development resources to agriculture, or to persist in discriminatory price and trade policies in the pursuit of cheap food policies.

#### *Income distribution effects.*

The contribution to improving the distribution of income depends in large part on how food aid is used. The popular image that the wealthy benefit from food aid has probably come from emergency programs in which local administrative and institutional capability was unequal to handling a large and unexpected inflow designed for disaster victims. The poor may also be at a disadvantage when food aid comes to a country where there is corruption at a local administrative level.

Emphasis on improving distribution of income and the lot of the poor has brought an emphasis on targeting food aid and a shift from program uses to project uses of food aid. The food-for-work program evolved in part as a means of assuring that food aid reached the really poor, as did school lunch programs, food for pregnant and lactating mothers, etc.

There is little doubt that food aid *can* be used to improve the distribution of income. Yet even well-intentioned programs may have effects counter to those desired. The great need is for more studies of the cost effectiveness of alternative programs. Some are very costly compared to ultimate outputs; not all can stand the scrutiny of an efficiency test.

#### *Development impacts, including effects on the balance of payments.*

The original "magic" of food aid, of course, was that it could free foreign exchange for development purposes with resources that had low opportunity cost to the donor country and in a way that generated local counterpart funds.

A typical question from the donor side is whether the food aid represents an additional transfer of resources that would not occur in its absence. The key issue from the recipient country's viewpoint is whether it is able to use food aid in place of more expensive financial aid, in whatever terms "expensive" is defined. Whatever "additionality" food aid brings can be frittered away, at least in part, in poor policies and programs that contribute less to development than the nominal value of the resources might suggest. But food aid can also give a greater command over domestic resources to the recipient government.

Counterpart funds generated by the local sale of the commodities become a potentially important source of governmental budget support. To the extent that governments are committed to de-

velopment, food aid contributes an additional source. Food aid contributes much less when government policies are not oriented towards humanitarian and developmental objectives.

Dependence on this relatively easy way of mobilizing local resources can also result in a failure to develop an effective fiscal system. It can permit support of a bloated bureaucracy whose contribution to development is likely to be small. Conversely, in a well-designed food-for-work program, it can finance high pay-off investments in infrastructure while providing income transfers to the really poor.

#### *Stabilization of food supplies and prices.*

Food aid can contribute to stabilization in at least two ways. In the short run, it can attenuate inflationary pressures that arise due to a crop short-fall. Timeliness is an important criterion. Bureaucratic delays and red tape tend to cripple regular food aid channels in satisfying this requirement.

Food aid can also be used to help stabilize longer-term development efforts. For example, in the absence of food aid a shortfall in one year's crop would require foreign exchange to be channeled to commercial food imports instead of to the raw materials and capital goods needed for development purposes.

Use of food aid for emergency stabilization purposes is probably declining in importance. Increased emphasis on development objectives has given more impetus to longer-term commitments of food aid. In addition, a growing number of financial facilities now provide short-term balance of payment support, and an increasingly well developed international capital market gives countries a place to turn to in times of stress.

#### *Expansion of markets for U.S. farm products.*

Market development is an important source of domestic political support for this form of foreign assistance in the face of declining support for other forms of foreign assistance. Moreover, there seems to be no basic conflict in theory, between the use of food aid to expand markets and its use for development.

How effective is food aid in promoting overseas markets? Since the 1960s almost all major PL 480 recipients have substantially increased their commercial purchases of U.S. farm products. Five developing areas—Taiwan, Republic of Korea, India, Egypt, and Indonesia—and two developed countries—Japan and Spain—are examples of PL 480 Title I recipients that have become active U.S. commercial customers.

Of course, expanding markets depend upon increases in per capita income. Thus the effective-

ness of food aid as development assistance, helping the recipient country to prosper at a faster rate, relates directly to how important it becomes as a strong commercial market.

#### *Dependencies of recipient countries on food aid availability and of the donor country on outlets for its production.*

If food aid does in fact enable a recipient country to put off the development of its agricultural sector, clearly it will continue to be dependent on food aid. Countries could also become dependent because of the contribution of counterpart funds to the domestic budget, and the reduced incentive to develop their own taxing instruments.

About all that one can say is that the long list of "graduates" from food aid suggests that whatever dependency there may be is not overpowering. Of course, donor countries could also become dependent on food aid programs, using them as a substitute for domestic adjustment policies. Support for food aid tends to strengthen when agricultural prices plunge.

#### **The Challenge of Food Aid Strategy**

Questions that must be answered for a successful food aid strategy were posed by one of the first day's speakers:

If financial resources for development were not a constraint, would we be able to specify how to bring about participative, equitable economic growth?

What advantages does food aid offer over direct financial assistance in this process?

How can food programs be designed to avoid dampening market incentives? Can we mobilize the political will needed to integrate urban and industrial food needs with rural supplies?

Does providing food rather than dollar resources give the U.S. more "leverage" in determining how the aid is used? If so, does the use of such leverage carry significant costs in other dimensions of U.S. foreign policy?

What limitations must be taken into account with regard to the administrative capacity of donors and recipients to use food aid as a catalyst to development rather than a source of disincentives? What can outsiders do to help build and use greater administrative capacity?

#### **Recent Experience with Food Aid**

##### *Bangladesh: Long-Term Aid Permits Policy Innovation*

Bangladesh was referred to frequently throughout the meeting, both because of the scale of food aid supporting its government's developmental and humanitarian objectives and because several participants have had first-hand experience there. Fur-

thermore, the U.S.-Bangladesh Title III agreement signed in 1978 is one of the first in which changes in the recipient country's basic food policy have been negotiated in return for multi-year assurance of U.S. food assistance.

Culminating several years of discussions with the Government of Bangladesh, the agreement seeks to establish a mechanism that will limit unseasonal grain price increases. The system which was established to feed the poor after the famine of 1943 has increasingly been supplying under-priced food to the middle class. Food aid-financed budgetary support for urban areas has acted over the years as a disincentive on prices and on government efforts to promote agricultural growth. Price stabilization, together with other related steps, is designed to help separate the ration system's price objectives, needed to promote food production, from its distributive or humanitarian objectives.

Several other features of the Bangladesh agreement are relevant for countries seeking to use PL 480 for development. Discussions with the Bangladesh government from 1972 to the present point up the need for U.S. staff who understand country policies, programs and options. Objectives of PL 480 activities in Bangladesh have changed over this period to reflect greater understanding of the diversity and complexity of the country's poverty.

The success of Title III negotiations with Bangladesh rested in part on the perceived need for changes in the public system, a perception made possible by recent analyses which have identified the inefficiencies and contradictions in the country's food and agricultural policies.

Since 1973-74, the government of Bangladesh has been procuring grain from domestic sources in steadily increasing amounts to make it less dependent on concessional imports at a critical time of need. The same mechanism designed to feed the cities is now offering the government a means of providing incentive prices for cultivators. But large purchases from domestic cultivators are creating severe cash flow problems which have forced government to continue its dependence upon food aid. In 1976 the combination of ample crops and food aid noticeably reduced prices for cultivators. The unexpected drop in grain prices and growth in public food stocks in 1976 and 1977 meant, for example, that fertilizer use and irrigation pump coverage fell below public availabilities.

It is now understood that food grain self-sufficiency in Bangladesh fails to provide as wide a distribution of benefits as one might hope, even with supportive policies. Most nations are capable of prescribing policies that will promote agricultural growth, but this seminar concludes that there is still little capacity to specify ways to employ food aid in stimulating productive activities for the poor. The

challenge emerged repeatedly: how can food aid be used to promote the productive well-being of rural people who own little or no land and have only very limited employment opportunities?

### **The Sahelian Countries: Building Institutional Capacity**

Food aid agreements under Title III are a newer phenomenon for Africa than for Asia, and are only now being considered for the Sahelian countries. The projected food deficits of those countries, when seen in light of their ecological and socio-economic conditions, make it clear that the Asian model is not appropriate.

Several participants spoke of characteristics that distinguish Central and West African agricultural systems from those of Asia.

The Sahel, encompassing twenty-six million people, does not have man-land ratios as high as those in Asia. Food imports are relatively minor, and urban populations are small—seldom more than ten percent. Land is comparatively evenly distributed, and there are no large groups of landless people.

The Sahelian countries cannot depend on seed or irrigation-based technologies like those which revolutionized significant areas of Asia. Physical infrastructures are poorly developed, as are the administrative capacities of central governments. What marketing systems exist are designed largely for crop procurement and export.

The region also has an economy of relatively high wages which casts doubt upon its comparative advantage in basic grains. Agriculture involves several crops as well as livestock, and a greater range of consumption substitutes is available to the rural population.

Title III agreements for such countries will be difficult to design because of economic conditions as well as limited institutional capacities for planning and implementation. Possible approaches involve exports, greater reliance upon food imports, food reserves, and greater attention to regional approaches and to market and other rural infrastructure. Sahelian food systems appear to have one thing in common with other systems: a price and distribution bias in favor of urban people.

### **Experiences of Other Countries**

At the time of the seminar, Title III agreements had been signed with two countries—Bolivia and Bangladesh. Negotiations were proceeding in several other countries—Egypt, Haiti, Honduras and Pakistan, to name four. The terms of these agreements and negotiations reflect the wide range of activities that can be supported with Title III—from policy-oriented agreements to ones which focus on projects.

The Bolivian agreement is an example of a project-oriented agreement designed to increase the rate at which existing development programs reach the rural population.

In Egypt, Title III funds will help the government decentralize its administration and accelerate the construction of rural service-oriented projects.

In Pakistan, on the other hand, a Title III agreement is being designed to continue a dialogue on food and agricultural policy. Local currencies generated by Title III will finance development activities, but macro policy is a central theme of the negotiations.

Descriptions of these and other country cases during the seminar helped to resolve controversial issues. There was general agreement that the "policy" vs. "project" issue had been misstated: regardless of whether policies or projects or both are involved in the negotiations, the important questions about a Title III proposal is how well it can link U.S. food aid to lasting benefits for poor people.

Administrative requirements of Title III must be minimized if scarce institutional capacities (in both the recipient and U.S. governments) are to be concentrated on program design. Comparison of the characteristics of Titles I and III helped the seminar identify some legislative and executive requirements and practices which appear to be burdensome.

#### **Areas of Substantial Agreement**

There were a number of points on which agreement in the seminar was so strong that they probably should be accepted as valid assumptions for food aid planning:

- PL 480's record is a good one. The disaster relief record, especially for India in the 1960s, has been outstanding.
- Recent changes in legislation make this a good time to consider new uses of food aid. The President's interest is evident, and the current relationships among agencies of the Executive Branch are uniquely conducive to effective consideration on these matters.
- Discussion of food aid cannot be separated from examination of a whole array of development problems affecting production, small farmers, and poor people. There is still no satisfactory body of knowledge about how to structure programs to enhance the productivity of the poor.
- Title III programs should directly or indirectly produce long-term improvements in the food intake of poor people; this expectation should be explained in each agreement.

"Who will benefit" needs to be constantly borne in mind, taking into account both production and distributive effects.

Prices and price policy alone are acknowledged to be a generally unsatisfactory means of redistributing income. It is true that their effects are powerful; the problem is that they frequently result in unpredictable, unintended, and often undesired shifts of income

from one group in society to another. (Experience with U.S. farm price policy was cited: it helped the rural poor only marginally at best, while benefitting substantially the large efficient producers who needed help least.) A plea was made for more attention to ways of separating price policy from income redistribution goals in low-income countries, so that price policy could be employed more effectively to guide the efficient use of resources. This is viewed as necessary if food aid is to provide incentives to producers, rather than disincentives.

- The U.S. Government should have no interest in pressing PL 480 agreements under Titles I, II, or III if the recipient countries do not want them. Greater account should also be taken of the views of officials of LDCs and other donors in implementing food aid.
- There is a critical need for U.S. staff who are knowledgeable, well-informed, sensitive, and perceptive about countries receiving food aid and about food assistance problems.

It is now commonplace to note that there is no younger generation of knowledgeable people coming on aid, aside from the unrealized potential of Title XII to date, no means of developing a new stock of human capital. One wonders how long this nation will remain in its intellectual insularity, and how many more mistakes in foreign economic and diplomatic policy we will have to endure before taking steps to improve our knowledge base.

- Institutional capacity to plan and administer these types of food programs in recipient countries is also limited.
- Policies on prices and related matters are a central consideration in designing food aid activities and related development efforts.

Unfortunately, implicit taxes and subsidies by means of trade and exchange rate policy are often a great deal more important than the more obvious, explicit policy interventions. Such policies shift the internal terms of trade severely against agriculture. Unless they are changed, food aid *per se* can have little effect on rural development. In fact, much more thought must be given to how the complex array of development-related policies in a country affects or is affected by the soundness and utility of food aid effort.

- There is need for a broad conceptualization of objectives. For example, rural development involves more than improved food production alone.
- U.S. food aid needs to be understood within each U.S. development assistance program. Inter-agency cooperation on food aid within the U.S. government structure, although it has improved substantially, continues to need attention.

- It is important for the U.S. and recipient countries to measure and evaluate the performance of food aid programs.

These evaluations need to be institutionalized; academic institutions can share in this effort. Studies are needed, for the most part, as guides to shaping future policy, and not in the monitoring sense.

#### Unanswered Questions and Areas of Disagreement

- To what extent should PL 480 (and other development programs) involve efforts to negotiate changes in recipient country policies?
- How energetic should the U.S. be in encouraging LDCs to clarify and separate price policies from income improvement policies?
- What is the extent of U.S. government commitment to the use of PL 480 to support development?
- To what degree are Title III agreements more attractive than Title I to recipient countries? In what ways? What criteria are needed to determine when Title I is appropriate and when Title III is appropriate?
- What should be the nature of sustained resource commitment in a PL 480 program? For example, what if an unexpectedly good harvest in a recipient country leads to a reduction in the need for PL 480 food, but the Title III program continues to require local currencies? Should AID funds then be made available to provide other non-food commodities to generate local currencies?
- What kinds of technical assistance are necessary to complement Title III activities?

#### Areas Not Discussed Extensively

- Extent to which taxes, international trade and non-price policies discriminate against the poor in low-income countries.
- Degree of attention to be given to investments in human capital, and the role of food in these efforts. For example, school lunch and nutrition programs are considered humanitarian, but they also enhance the productivity of people.
- Ways in which food can be used to support land and tenure reform programs.

#### Remaining Problems and Proposed Follow-up Activities

Country studies of past food aid programs are badly needed. A record of actual experience could shed considerable light on present and prospective strategies for supporting development and alleviating hunger.

Possible countries for study include:

India	Nigeria	Bangladesh
Indonesia	Sri Lanka	Sahelian Countries
Haiti	Pakistan	Bolivia
Colombia		

Frameworks of analysis must be developed that give attention to issues related to food aid programming and implementation. Special consideration should be given to households, formal models, and trade relationships. Underlying all of these is the stubborn question of how to use food aid to increase food intake of poor people without adversely affecting food production.

Potential linkages between international food reserves and PL 480 in the context of U.S. food reserves need to be studied.

The advantages and disadvantages of Title III deserve more examination.

Research should be directed at the origins, interests and constituencies for changes in food aid legislation that will emphasize managing the program to benefit poor people and promote development.

There are some areas in which emerging ideas from social science research are inadequately used. The new "household economics," with what it suggests about investment in human capital, offers policy insights that deserve to be considered.

Past PL 480 research has had only limited relevance to current food aid issues. Competence of U.S. government and university personnel to study these issues and to deal with them is limited, a situation which must be corrected as rapidly as possible.

An effort must be made to establish and maintain public confidence in the effectiveness of U.S. food program management.

The relative independence of production and consumption effects continues to be a concern. The seminar repeatedly noted situations in which successful production efforts offer little promise of easing the condition of up to two-thirds of the people who are hungry.

A future ADC/RTN session might focus on frameworks for analysis of food aid in receiving countries. Another session should be held overseas to involve experts from receiving countries along with those of the U.S. and other donor countries.

#### Implementation of U.S. Food Aid—Title III

##### AGENDA

<i>Monday, January 15</i>	Chairman: A.M. Weisblat	
9:00 a.m.-12 noon	<i>The Effects of Food Aid: The Record PL 480: Its Legislative History</i>	Edward Schuh Janice Baker Nelson Denlinger
	Open Discussion	

2:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. *Forces that Will Shape Food Aid in the Future*  
Discussant  
Open Discussion

*Tuesday, January 16* Chairman:  
A.M. Weisblat

9:00 a.m.-12 noon *Experience, Lessons and Implications of Recent Title III Negotiations*  
AID: Two Case Studies  
USDA: Two Case Studies  
Open Discussion

1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. Open Discussion  
Concluding Remarks

Peter Timmer  
Edward J. Clay  
Joseph F. Stepanek

James Mudge  
Joseph F. Stepanek

Fred Welz

Walter P. Falcon  
Edward Schuh  
Alexander Shakow

## PAPERS

*Presented at the Workshop on "Implementation of U.S. Food Aid—Title III" Jan. 15-16, 1979*

Janice E. Baker Food for Peace, 1954-1978: Major Changes in Legislation

Edward J. Clay Food Aid and the Economic Development of Bangladesh

Joseph F. Stepanek Food for Development: A Food Aid Policy, July 1979

H. Schneider Food Aid and Development (edited) OECD Development Centre, 1978

G. Edward Schuh The Effects of Food Aid: The Record and Concluding Remarks: Implementation of U.S. Food Aid—Title III

C. Peter Timmer Food Aid and Development: Some Issues

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