

NON-EMERGENCY FOOD AID: A RESOURCE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER AND A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

**A Policy Statement of Counterpart International's
Division for Food Security
and Sustainable Agriculture**

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a. Preamble

The need for food is a basic human necessity, a universal that cuts across all cultures, classes, time and space. Every parent wants to see their children grow up well nourished and healthy. Every human being wants to feel the warmth of a good meal, earned through the fruits of the labor of their family and community.

Yet some 850 million people suffer from debilitating effects of hunger, trapped in situations of poverty and malnourishment.¹ Production systems fail as a result of political, environmental and climatic factors. Distribution systems and entitlements to food collapse with market fluctuations or political instability. Food is often utilized incorrectly, stored poorly, or prepared in a way that underutilizes its nutrients.

As an organization that believes passionately in creating a just world, Counterpart envisions a world where families will no longer have to worry about how they will find their next meal. Therefore, Counterpart believes that:

1. *It cannot stand idly by while millions starve*
2. *Sustainable access to adequate, nutritious and culturally appropriate food is a human right²*
3. *Every available resource that can be used efficiently and effectively must be used to combat hunger*

Food insecurity is a complex phenomenon and it would be foolish and naïve to assume that only one resource can put an end to this terrible scourge. However, food aid is one resource that has been particularly useful in the fight against hunger. This policy statement by Counterpart International's Division for Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture argues that *food aid can be an important resource for furthering the development of poor and food-insecure communities, provided that it is used appropriately, in ways that do no harm*. As a recent study by the Bread for the World Institute said, "Food aid is one useful tool among many."³ Counterpart also therefore believes that food aid, in addressing the underlying causes of hunger, must be integrated into broader food security and development programs.

This specific document focuses only on long term developmental, not emergency, uses of food aid. Counterpart is a member of the Alliance for Food Aid. This statement is intended to supplement, not supplant, the Alliance's "Statement of Mission and Principles."⁴

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). (2004) *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2004*. Rome, FAO.

² See, for instance, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and social services..." United Nations. (10 December 1948) "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." <<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>>.

³ Bread for the World Institute. (2006) "Feeding a Hungry World: A Vision for Food Aid in the 21st Century." Position Paper. Washington DC, Bread for the World Institute. p. 2.

⁴ Alliance for Food Aid. (26 June 2006) "Statement of Mission and Principles." Washington DC, Alliance for Food Aid.

b. Principles⁵

In programs where Counterpart uses food aid, it will endeavor to:

1. Use it appropriately and efficiently as a development resource. Monetization can be an effective tool when a simple cash transfer from one country to another that would achieve the same objectives is not available.
2. Consider access to food a basic human right and frame its programming so that it does not discriminate against recipients based on their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, ideology, sexual orientation, nationality or physical abilities.
3. Do no harm by preventing damage to local markets, not playing into systems of corruption, nor fostering relationships of dependency. This includes ensuring food aid is not used as a political reward, withheld as punishment or used as a means of physical, religious, political or economic coercion.
4. Use it to develop the capacity for sustainable local systems of food security, restoring or developing sustainable availability, access and proper utilization of food, and reducing risk to these systems.
5. Target particularly those who are most vulnerable and food insecure.
6. Ensure programming and commodities are tailored precisely to the local situation and culture through extensive prior and ongoing needs assessment, and community participation.
7. Develop exit strategies that ensure sustainability while taking into account the local food situation.
8. Maintain transparency, effectiveness and accountability through continual monitoring and evaluation of projects and key indicators.
9. Learn lessons from its successes and mistakes and stay abreast of developing research into food aid programming, incorporate these into new and ongoing projects.
10. Develop effective partnerships with governments, organizations, local communities and individuals of good will, and integrate food aid programs with broader development efforts.
11. Conform to the basic standards outlined in the Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, international food aid protocols, and US and local law⁶.

c. Positives

According to the field experience of Counterpart and other aid agencies, the effective use of food aid has been shown to have the following possible positive effects in a developmental context:

1. Food aid contributes to a decline in malnutrition, which is a major investment in the long-term health and educability of a child, a key foundation for development.⁷

⁵ Adapted and enlarged from “Principles” section of: Alliance for Food Aid. “Statement.”

⁶ The Sphere Project. (2006) “Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.” <<http://www.sphereproject.org/>>.

2. In certain situations, monetization or distribution can help stabilize food prices that have risen above the market equilibrium.⁸ Food aid can also provide “incentives to promote growth”⁹ through encouraging enterprise, especially in the milling industry.¹⁰
3. Food aid is more difficult to steal and divert than cash aid, and is less likely to be affected by currency market fluctuations.¹¹
4. Food aid has strong domestic support in the US that reduces the likelihood of it being cut from the budget, building support for foreign aid in general.

d. Challenges

Critics have raised concerns about food aid used in a non-emergency context. While many of these are unwarranted, Counterpart believes the following challenges do indeed arise in poorly designed food aid programs:

1. Food aid, even when monetized, can create unfair competition for local producers and destabilize local commodity markets if a careful market analysis is not carried out and followed.¹²
2. If not designed to develop a sustainable local food security, it can develop a system of dependency where recipients rely solely upon food aid.
3. When food aid commodities are culturally inappropriate for the local diet, recipients can feel a sense of alienation, or may underutilize the aid they receive.
4. When an efficient and effective logistics and storage system is lacking, aid may not reach the intended beneficiaries on time, commodities may be past their use-by date or poor packaging may lead to leakage.
5. The complex logistics of food aid transportation and storage can sometimes become a preoccupation of staff – taking away valuable resources and time from other development activities.
6. Monetization “requires intensive management and is fraught with risks.” It can also be “economically inefficient” if the aim is not to stabilize prices – that is, one buys food in the donor country and then sells it in the recipient country.¹³
7. When proper monitoring systems are not in place, commodities may be captured by local vested interests or diverted to inappropriate uses. (see c 3 above – be consistent).
8. Some food for work projects do not provide enough food to recover the additional nutritional requirements needed to do the difficult physical labor required to receive the commodities.

⁷ Hansch, S. & Sykes, C. (May 2005) “Key Myths about NGO/PVO Food Aid Programming.” Based on Keynote Plenary Presentation at the ‘Mega Food Aid Workshop. p. 1.

⁸ Hansch & Sykes. “Key Myths.” pp. 4-5.

⁹ Bezuneh, M., Deaton, B. & Zahir, S. (2003) “Food Aid Disincentives: The Tunisian Experience.” *Review of Development Economics*. 7(4).

¹⁰ Tschirley, D. Donovan, C. & Weber, M.T. (1996) “Food aid and food markets: lessons from Mozambique.” *Food Policy*. 21(2).

¹¹ Hansch & Sykes. “Key Myths.” p. 4.

¹² CARE-USA. (23 November 2005) “White Paper on Food Aid Policy.” p. 2.

¹³ CARE-USA. “White Paper.” p. 5.

9. Many distributors of food aid focus only on carbohydrates, proteins and/or oils and fails to incorporate micro-nutrients such as vitamins and minerals.¹⁴
10. Food aid can sometimes “depress incentives for producers and traders to invest” in local agricultural production and marketing.¹⁵ Moreover, poorly planned food aid has often not been countercyclical to the economic cycle (i.e. food is provided when there is a food surplus rather than deficit) and has had damaging macroeconomic effects.¹⁶

These challenges, when they occur can be serious and have sometimes given food aid a bad reputation. However, some of these problems are found across the aid and development sector – they are not problems specific to food aid. Counterpart believes that when aid agencies follow the principles outlined in section b of this document, many of these problems will not occur.

e. Counterpart’s Uses of Non-Emergency Food Aid

Counterpart believes that when carried out according to the principles outlined in section b, the following forms of non-emergency food aid programming can provide vital assistance in the fight to develop local food security capacity:

1. *Food for Education.* Provision of food aid in schools, in the form of meals, snacks or take-home rations, is an effective method of distributing food widely among children. It encourages school attendance and has a proven positive effect on performance in exams. It can also be used to encourage a more equitable gender balance in schools. Counterpart’s program in northern Senegal has seen a dramatic effect on student attendance in primary schools. In the Fulani Toucouleur culture, most young boys are expected to assist their semi-nomadic families with cattle herding duties, to the detriment of their education. Providing hot meals daily allows parents to leave their children in school where socioeconomic constraints would have otherwise led to their removal from school.
2. *Food for Work (FFW) and/or Training.* Providing food in exchange for labor in public works projects (such as development of rural infrastructure, roads, or irrigation) can stimulate the local economy and lay the foundations for the development of local food security capacity. FFW not only provides participating households with critical food resources during the lean season, but the infrastructure programs have a positive impact on long-term, community food security. Providing food at training sessions (for instance on improved agricultural techniques or nutrition) can encourage the learning of skills that will improve the food security situation. For instance, in Tajikistan, Counterpart has

¹⁴ Hansch & Sykes. “Key Myths.” p. 2.

¹⁵ Tschirley et al. “Food aid.”

¹⁶ Gupta, S., Clements, B. & Tiongson, E.R. (2004) “Foreign Aid and Consumption Smoothing: Evidence from Global Food Aid.” *Review of Development Economics*. 8(3).

Barnett, C.B. & Heisey, K.C. (2002) “How effectively does multilateral food aid respond to fluctuating needs?” *Food Policy*. 27.

provided food for work to underpaid health workers, to compensate for their work with food insecure populations in the Kulob area.

3. *Supplemental Feeding and Take Home Household Distributions.* Certain sectors of the population (such as pregnant or lactating mothers and persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)) have specific food needs or additional energy requirements due to a medical condition. Providing food through clinics, other health structures or community based organizations, can be an important way to combat malnutrition among these people. Counterpart's experience with food aid for PLWHA illustrates the importance of food as a health intervention for individuals on antiretroviral (ARV) treatment and as an incentive for PLWHA to join associations. Adherence to medications is enhanced, while vulnerability of affected families, especially children and mothers, decreases in such programs.¹⁷
4. *Monetization.* Monetizing food commodities can stabilize prices that have risen above their equilibrium, stimulate the local food trading and milling sectors and make up food deficits within a country. In addition, monetization provides valuable resources for food security programming (such as agricultural development, environmental rehabilitation, and enterprise development) that is not generally available from government donors. Most monetization programs accept local currency, which spares traders from having to acquire expensive or scarce "hard" international currencies.

¹⁷ This has also been shown in the following research: Global Health Council. (n.d.) "Food as a Health Intervention." <http://globalhealth.org/images/pdf/gh_opportunities/food.pdf>.

Annex 1: Non-Emergency Food Aid and the MDGs

Counterpart believes that through creative, intelligent food aid programming, in partnership with local people, it can make progress toward all of the UN Millennium Development Goals.¹⁸ It can help:

1. *“Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger”* through the development of sustainable and food secure communities
2. *“Achieve universal primary school education”* through school feeding programs
3. *“Promote gender equality and empower women”* through careful targeting of food aid to women and encouragement of education of primary school girls in school feeding
4. *“Reduce child mortality”* by reducing child malnutrition
5. *“Improve maternal health”* through integrating food aid for new mothers and children into maternal and child health programs
6. *“Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases”* through therapeutic feeding of HIV/AIDS patients and integrating public health programming into food security projects
7. *“Ensure environmental sustainability”* by using food for work programs, or money from monetized food aid, to rehabilitate the environment and encourage sustainable agriculture
8. *“Develop a global partnership for development”* by using food aid to link many stakeholders together in the battle against hunger. Food aid can develop links between the producers and suppliers in the developed world with their counterparts in the developing world and be used to create awareness of world hunger.

Annex 2: Counterpart’s Positions on ‘Hot Topics’ in Food Aid

Food aid, like all elements of the aid sector has been subject to considerable politicization. Specifically it has been caught in the middle of four major debates on food policy:

1. *Subsidies*. Food aid has been caught up in global trade debates over whether price supports and subsidies for developed world farmers harm producers in the developing world by lowering the international commodity prices (a government appropriation for food aid could be seen as a form of a subsidy, because it is a government purchase of a privately produced commodity). Subsidies on developed world food production may indeed hurt some developing world producers, but since “two-thirds of low income countries are net importers of food” subsidies in the developed world may also subsidize consumption in many poor countries. This is a complex economic debate and Counterpart does not presume to be able to resolve it in this paper. However, Counterpart does feel that to a certain extent the debate is rather overblown when it relates to food aid – as

¹⁸ United Nations. (2005) “The UN Millennium Development Goals.”
<<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>>.

“food aid today plays a minor, insignificant role in overall food exports.”¹⁹
 Indeed “food aid comprises no more than 2 percent of international trade.”²⁰

2. *Tying of Aid and Local Purchase.* Food aid provided by some governments, including the US, could be seen as a form of ‘tied aid.’ For instance, when the US government buys food aid, it does so only from US farmers and suppliers – it does not allow open bidding from the global market. This may raise the price of food aid to a level that is higher than it needs to be, as there is a lack of global competitive bidding. Said one NGO report, “The cost of tied food aid has been shown to be significantly higher – in many cases 30-50% higher – than alternative, non-tied sources of food aid.”²¹ A related argument is that by buying food in the developed world, one misses the opportunity to infuse cash into developing world markets, by purchasing food aid in the locality or region of the beneficiary country. In both of these related debates Counterpart is not opposed in principle to untying of US food aid, or to local or regional purchase. Indeed, sometimes “there are situations where purchases closer to the area of need could provide more timely response, diversity of food basket, and benefits to local agricultural development.”²² However, it believes that enormous care would need to be taken to ensure that i) this would not lead to a reduction in in-kind assistance offered by the US government, ii) commodity quality would not be reduced, iii) local and regional markets would not be distorted by large purchase orders and iv) a large scale shift towards untying or local purchase is not carried out precipitously. As per the Alliance for Food Aid position, Counterpart believes there must be much more research done on this issue, and that several pilot programs should be set up to test the effectiveness of these ideas.

3. *US Export Objectives.* As mentioned in a recent study, “U.S. food aid programs seek to ‘expand international trade’ and ‘develop and expand export markets for United States agricultural commodities,’ objectives that may blur the fundamental goal of feeding hungry people.”²³ This indeed may at times distort US food aid priorities. Counterpart, and other members of the Alliance for Food Aid, would raise its objections to the US government if it felt commercial objectives were overriding humanitarian ones. However, Counterpart also acknowledges that any donor, especially a government, may have objectives other than altruism when providing development assistance. This is not unusual or unique to food aid, indeed much US foreign assistance in general is provided with national security

¹⁹ Hansch & Sykes. “Key Myths.” pp. 3, 5.

²⁰ Alliance for Food Aid. “Statement.” p. 2.

²¹ CARE-USA. “White Paper.” p. 4.

See also: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2005) “The Development Effectiveness of Food Aid: Does Tying Matter?” Paris, OECD.

²² Alliance for Food Aid. “Statement.” p. 7.

²³ Bread for the World. Institute. “Feeding.” p. 2.

See also: Neumayer, E. (2004) “Is the Allocation of Food Aid Free from Donor Interest Bias?” *Journal of Development Studies*. 41(3).

Uvin, P. (1992) “Regime, Surplus, and Self-Interest: The International Politics of Food Aid.” *International Studies Quarterly*. 36.

interests in mind. The key for aid agencies is to work out how to use such resources without becoming lackeys for a donor's interests – this is done through careful vigilance and professional management of programming.

4. *Vested Interests*. There are many vested commercial interests in food aid. Producers, brokers, packagers, shippers and lobbyists all earn money from supplying food aid. Food aid may also assist in the institutional survival of many NGOs. These vested interests could present a problem if they distort food aid priorities from the provision to the most needy, or if they prevent efficient programming. Eternal vigilance in this regard is necessary. However, these vested interests are not necessarily a bad thing – together they form a powerful community for ensuring the appropriation of food aid by donor governments. Other forms of aid, such as cash, do not have such a natural constituency ensuring its survival. Foreign aid budgets are often seen as superfluous by donor governments and in times of budget crunches they may be the first to be slimmed. The strong food aid community ensures that donor governments, especially the US, cannot escape their responsibility for ending world hunger. This is why Counterpart, as a member of the advocacy group Alliance for Food Aid, is a strong supporter of US food aid and works with the various US domestic stakeholders to raise their awareness of development issues.

Annex 3. Further Reading

- Alliance for Food Aid. (26 June 2006) "Statement of Mission and Principles." Washington DC, Alliance for Food Aid.
- Barnett, C.B. & Heisey, K.C. (2002) "How effectively does multilateral food aid respond to fluctuating needs?" *Food Policy*. 27.
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- Uvin, P. (1992) “Regime, Surplus, and Self-Interest: The International Politics of Food Aid.” *International Studies Quarterly*. 36.

Annex 4: Glossary

- ARV** – Antiretroviral. Drugs used to suppress the replication of the HIV virus and thus prolong the health of PLWHA.
- Development** – The process of positive economic, political and social change.
- Dependency** – When beneficiaries of assistance rely on that aid, and are unable to sustain themselves through their own labor or resources.
- Economic cycle** – The cycle of growth and recession in an economy.
- Food access** – “when households and all individuals within them have adequate resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Access depends on income available to the household, the distribution of income within the household, and the price of food.”²⁴
- Food aid** – Assistance provided in the form of food commodities on a concessionary basis.
- Food availability** – “when sufficient quantities of food are consistently available to all individuals within a country. Such food can be supplied through household production, other domestic output, commercial imports, or food assistance.”²⁵
- Food for education** – The use of food aid to bolster educational programs, such as providing school lunches or snacks.
- Food for training** – The use of food aid to bolster vocational training programs, such as providing lunches or rations to trainees.
- Food for work** – The use of food aid as a form of full or partial payment for labor on public works projects.

²⁴ USAID OFDA. (August 1998) *Field Operations Guide for Disaster Assessment and Response*. Version 3.0 Washington DC, USAID OFDA. <<http://www.info.usaid.gov/ofda/>>. pp. III-22.

²⁵ USAID. *Field Operations*. pp. III-22.

- Food security** – “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”²⁶
- Food utilization** – “the proper biological use of food, requiring a diet providing sufficient energy and essential nutrients, potable water, and adequate sanitation. Effective food utilization depends in large measure on knowledge within the household of food storage and processing techniques, basic principles of nutrition, and proper child care.”²⁷
- HIV/AIDS** – HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) infects cells in the human immune system. HIV leads to AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), a disease characterized by the destruction of the immune system.²⁸
- Leakage** – Loss of aid commodities due to broken packaging, decomposition, corruption, etc.
- Malnutrition** – Condition caused by lack of enough food or balanced diet.
- Micro-nutrients** – “Vitamins and minerals that have no caloric value and little direct impact on hormonal response, but are a vital means of achieving optimal health.”²⁹
- Monetization** – Selling of food aid commodities in order to support humanitarian or development programs.
- Non-emergency food aid** – Food aid provided to support developmental programs, as opposed to food aid provided in humanitarian emergencies such as natural disasters or complex emergencies.
- PLWHA** – People Living with HIV/AIDS.
- School feeding** – Providing food aid in schools through meals, snacks or rations.
- Supplemental feeding** – The provision of extra nutrition to people who may have the majority of their food needs met, but require specific additional nutrients. This may be due to a medical condition (pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, breastfeeding) or a lack of specific necessary commodities in the local economy.
- Sustainable agriculture** – “Farming that provides a secure living for farm families; maintains the natural environment and resources; supports the rural community; and offers respect and fair treatment to all involved, from farm workers to consumers to the animals raised for food.”³⁰

²⁶ FAO SPFS. (n.d.) “Defining Food Security.” *The Special Programme for Food Security*. <http://www.fao.org/spfs/intro_en.stm>.

²⁷ USAID. Field Operations. pp. III-22.

²⁸ Paraphrased from: Wikipedia. (10 October 2006) “AIDS.” *Wikipedia*. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HIV/AIDS>>.

²⁹ Zone Café. (2006) “Zone Diet Glossary.” <http://www.zonecafe.com/zone_cafe_contact/05_zone-diet-glossary.asp>.

³⁰ Sustainable Table. (n.d.) “Sustainable Dictionary.” <<http://www.sustainabletable.org/intro/dictionary/>>.

Sphere Project Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster

Response – A set of standards and guidelines for humanitarian programs developed by a broad coalition of agencies. See: <http://www.sphereproject.org>

Take home rations – Provision of food aid rations to beneficiaries, for preparation and use at home (as opposed to the provision of a cooked meal).