



Uniting on Food Assistance

Promoting an Evidence-Based Transatlantic Dialogue and Convergence

Project Summary

Over the past twenty years, the demand for food aid and food assistance in response to natural and manmade disasters has grown substantially. Yet over the same period food aid volumes have been falling. Donor countries are increasingly finding more flexible and efficient means of responding to food insecurity in low income countries. Much food aid has become untied, local and regional procurement has become widespread, and increasing attention is being paid to the nutritional quality and safety of food aid commodities.

Yet these constantly evolving donor strategies have caused wide differences to occur between donor policies and practices. These differences impede progress on renegotiation of the Food Aid Convention, the core treaty addressing global food aid donations, as well as on a WTO agreement.

Progress on those fronts and reform of the global governance of food aid and food assistance requires convergence between major humanitarian donors such as the European Commission (EC) and the US Government. A transatlantic initiative on food aid and food assistance is therefore very important at this time. However, such an initiative can only be successful if embedded in a larger international strategy, including other relevant actors, such as recipient countries and emerging donors like China, the Arab countries, or Brazil.

Our objective is to assemble and communicate empirical evidence to inform

dialogue and support convergence among key policymakers and practitioners. Therefore, in collaboration with Cornell University, the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) launched a new research and dialogue project on food aid and food assistance.

As part of this program, the team will continue the series of Transatlantic Dialogues on Humanitarian Action, which were developed as part of the transatlantic pilot project "*Raising the Bar*". In the current project, two dialogues will bring together 30-40 European, US and international policymakers complemented by a selection of experts from relevant UN organizations, academia, NGOs and interest groups. The first meeting in the series focusing on food aid will be held in July 2010, in Berlin, Germany.

In preparation for the dialogue, the team will conduct a study on the Food Aid Convention and the issues surrounding its renegotiation. We propose to identify points of convergence and contention on framing the Food Aid Convention in the face of newly emergent issues and best practices. Key findings of the study will be presented as background material for the dialogue.

Based on that first study and the outcomes of the dialogue, we will conduct three empirical case studies. The goal of the empirical studies is to provide the substantive base for enhanced transatlantic



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dialogue, identifying which form of aid is most appropriate when.

This would not only help operational staff to make evidence-based decisions, but would help to identify possible complementarities and opportunities for convergence between EC and US practices, thereby supporting donor coordination. Likely areas of importance identified through our preliminary research include:

Trans-Atlantic approaches to food assistance coordination, which is the overarching, and most central area. Making progress on coordination is essential for nurturing advances in all other sectors; be it needs analysis, financial coordination, or integrating relief efforts with local contexts. Our first case study could focus on needs assessments and improving coordination between the many different actors in the food aid and food assistance sector and explore the critical issues in the design and implementation of more coherent and coordinated food aid and food assistance interventions.

Challenges and opportunities in new modalities of food assistance, which centres on procurement and distribution strategies of major donors. With the benefits and limits of different forms of procurement (international vs. local) and distribution (in kind, vouchers, cash) being widely debated, our second case study could help foster consensus on procurement and distribution best practices and facilitate donor coordination around food purchases and deliveries during humanitarian crises.

Finally, questions of **food quality and safety** are becoming evermore central to food assistance debates. The current focus of the Food Aid Convention on cereal tonnage and monetary contributions is increasingly at odds with the humanitarian and development communities' emphasis on nutritional content. Furthermore, issues of food quality and safety also necessarily touch on the role of genetically modified

foods in food aid. Thus, a third case study could assemble and analyze the emergent evidence on best practices in food quality and safety.

The second dialogue event will take place in Washington, DC, USA, with a focus on discussing the research findings and developing joint recommendations. The findings and recommendations will then be disseminated during May – June 2011, in order to share results with the larger public and enhancing buy-in from policymakers. The recommendations will be presented to the European Commission in 2011 to inform its position regarding food aid and food assistance at the next EU-US Summit.

The Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) is an independent think tank based in Berlin and Geneva. GPPi's mission is to develop innovative strategies for effective and accountable governance and to achieve lasting impact at the interface of the public sector, business and civil society through research, consulting, and debate.

The Department of Applied Economics and Management (AEM) of Cornell University has, since its inception in 1909, been concerned with the application of the theories and tools of economics and management to agricultural, food, and resource systems and to rural communities.

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