

KEY PLAYERS IN FOOD AID



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In Haiti, these women get clean water courtesy of the Food and Agriculture Organization, one of the United Nations agencies providing food aid.

More than half of the world's food aid comes from the United States. Getting food from U.S. farms to food aid recipients in the developing world can be a daunting and controversial task. Pulling off the complicated journey from fields to feeding centers calls into play a number of disparate players, including international bodies, national legislatures, the agriculture industry and its lobbyists, nongovernmental organizations, and advocacy groups. And only a few major organizations provide guidance on the process. Who is involved and what laws and initiatives govern how the food is distributed?

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID): USAID, which operates the Food for Peace program, is the lead U.S. government agency providing humanitarian food assistance to developing countries. The program marked its 50th year in 2004. It was initially created as a way to stem hunger and malnutrition in some of the world's poorest regions and to help the U.S. agriculture industry. The official mandate comes from Public Law 480, Title II. The

law calls for USAID to make donations of aid to "cooperating sponsors," such as nongovernmental organizations, in both emergency and long-term efforts in food assistance. Subsequent laws over the years have expanded and clarified this mission. In 2006, the United States provided \$2.2 billion in food aid to 82 developing countries, making it the top provider of food aid in the world.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): USDA is a close partner with USAID

in carrying out the U.S. government's food aid programs, but it focuses more on the agribusiness aspects of humanitarian food assistance, both for U.S. producers and for agribusiness in developing countries. USDA is responsible for international trade agreements and negotiations on food aid as well. USDA's international experts are based in more than 90 countries, and there are also agricultural trade offices in key markets to serve U.S. exporters and foreign buyers.

United Nations: The primary players here are the U.N. World Food Program (WFP), the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and the U.N. Development Program (UNDP). Any appeal for emergency food aid — for earthquake victims or refugees of civil war — will more than likely come from the World Food Program, the best known of the U.N. family of hunger agencies. It is the first responder in the world of food aid.



Participants in the World Food Program's "Walk the World" global march against hunger in Rome in 2005. Proceeds raised by the annual event go to the WFP's Global School Feeding Program, which provides free school meals to millions of children in developing countries.

The WFP, which is based in Rome, distributes food assistance to nearly 88 million people, with about one-third of that going to development projects and the remaining two-thirds going to emergencies and relief and recovery operations. The WFP works with multilateral and bilateral groups, individual countries, corporations, and foundations to collect and distribute food and other commodities.

The other U.N. organizations focus on the underlying causes — and solutions to — food insecurity. The FAO works on identifying and reversing the causes of world hunger in rural areas. It helps countries modernize their agriculture sectors so that they will be able to feed their people. The Consultative Subcommittee on Surplus Disposal (CSSD), which was established by FAO, attempts to properly dispose of surplus food by facilitating donations to countries where the food is needed and can be of use without disruptions to the normal flow of commerce in those countries.

The International Fund for Agricultural Development provides low-interest loans and grants to fund these sorts of agriculture improvements. To date, the figure amounts to about \$10 billion invested in rural agriculture projects. The UNDP works on a number of development issues, with combating food insecurity being one part.

Nongovernmental Organizations/Private Voluntary Organizations (NGOs/PVOs): NGOs and PVOs play leading roles in feeding the hungry in emergency and nonemergency situations. Their workers are the ones television viewers typically see on site in some dangerous or dire situations, passing out food aid to those in need. Some of the better-known outfits are Catholic Relief Services, CARE, Oxfam, and World Vision, but dozens of similar organizations with lower profiles work in countries where food security is perilous.

Businesses and Foundations: Increasingly, national and international corporations are promoting their work — or the work of their foundations — in combating world hunger. Corporate social responsibility is the catchphrase to describe such efforts, which typically provide needed goods and expertise in developing countries. Well known are a few big foundations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Some companies have found mechanisms that allow them to partner with governments and with bilateral and multilateral organizations to help spread their largess. Land O'Lakes, a leading U.S. farmer-owned cooperative, works with USAID, for example. Volunteers in its Southern Africa Farmer-to-Farmer program provide agricultural and business expertise in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia. Land O'Lakes volunteers work also in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russia.

GUIDING AGREEMENTS

Food Aid Convention (FAC): The Food Aid Convention, agreed to in 1967, is set for reauthorization in 2007. The FAC has been reauthorized a number of times over its lifetime. The pact addresses cooperation among 23 large food aid donor countries and sets minimum donation levels that are intended to ensure enough food for people in developing countries who need it. It is run by the London-based International Grains Council, which is responsible for keeping statistics on the amount of food aid donated and where it is going.

World Trade Organization (WTO): WTO members have yet to come to an agreement on how that body will address food aid. The latest round of negotiations has been suspended, with food aid reform as one of the points of contention.

COMMITMENTS FOR FUTURE PROGRESS

U.N. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): The first of the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals calls for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. Specifically, the goals call for a reduction by half of the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. This

and seven other MDGs were created at the beginning of 2000 by U.N. member nations in an effort to begin the new century with an ambitious plan to improve the world. The target date for the hunger and all other goals to be met is 2015.

At the end of 2006, progress was measurable but slow. Even though hunger rates (a measure of the percentage of people who suffer from chronic hunger) have dropped, the actual number of people who are hungry has increased. The goals and deadline are meant to encourage wealthier countries to take meaningful steps to help poor countries defeat hunger within their borders.

G8 Initiative: In 2004, the Group of Eight industrialized countries (G8) — the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, and the United Kingdom — made promises to address hunger in countries on the African continent with some of the direst situations, particularly in the Horn of Africa. The approach is three-pronged: provide a safety net for communities that routinely face food insecurity, improve global response to food crises on the continent, and boost agriculture production in rural areas of Africa. The goal is to end famine in the Horn of Africa by 2009. G8 summits in 2005, 2006, and 2007 included progress updates on the effort. In 2005, in particular, the world's richest countries addressed development in Africa.

Presidential Initiative to End Hunger in Africa: This initiative from the United States was announced in 2003. It is part of the U.S. effort to meet commitments made at G8 summits to address the issue. Under this initiative, the United States, through USAID, is working on agriculture reform in sub-Saharan Africa under the Comprehensive Africa Agricultural Development Program.

— *Compiled by Angela Rucker, USAID*