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# UNITING ON FOOD ASSISTANCE

Action paper

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The global problem of hunger and malnutrition shows no signs of abating. Around the world, 925 million people – more than the populations of the European Union and the United States combined – are currently undernourished. At least double that number suffer from insufficient intake of crucial micronutrients such as iodine, iron, vitamin A and zinc. Year by year, conflicts, natural disasters and rising food prices keep pushing millions into hunger and poverty.

Combating hunger and food insecurity requires a comprehensive approach. Chronic food insecurity needs long-term development strategies. Acute hunger and undernutrition at the same time need life-saving food assistance – the focus of this paper.

Food assistance policies and operational practices have seen considerable innovation in the last decade. Despite this progress, food assistance still falls short of its potential to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of the acutely malnourished. Some of these shortfalls can be overcome through improved cooperation and coordination between the main food assistance donors, the European Commission and the United States, and through convergence among the major donors and operational agencies around innovative practices.

### Current challenges

Food assistance faces a series of challenges that must be addressed in the near future. The main issues are:

- Outdated international governance mechanisms that do not support current innovations in food assistance much less facilitate further progress
- Gaps in needs-based food assistance where recipient needs and humanitarian responses do not match
- Insufficient linkage between humanitarian assistance and development assistance, seen in the continuing difficulties in pursuing a twin-track approach to food security

### A call for transatlantic action

The transatlantic partners need to take the lead in addressing these challenges. The European Commission, the EU member states and the U.S. government together provide more than 65% of global food assistance. Moreover, their policies and actions considerably shape norms, policies and practices in food assistance worldwide. The European Commission and the U.S. government therefore have the means to drive change, especially if they work in partnership with emerging donors, operational agencies and recipients of food assistance.

The European Commission and the U.S. government also have before them important opportunities for working together more closely. Despite frequent misunderstandings, they have increasingly converged their approaches to food assistance. Both donors now employ more intensive needs assessment and response analysis methods to allocate scarce resources. They are looking more carefully at the nutritional content and impact of their assistance. And they are using more cash- and voucher-based assistance, as well as local and regional food purchases in lieu of tied, transoceanic shipments. This growing coherence should enable the transatlantic partners to jointly tackle the challenges outlined above.

## Recommendations

We offer the following recommendations to the European Commission and the U.S. government:

1. Reform the outdated Food Aid Convention
2. Close the FAO Consultative Sub-committee on Surplus Disposal
3. Agree on definitions of emergency food aid in the WTO negotiations
4. Improve information gathering and its use to provide context-specific food assistance
5. Invest in capacity building to improve the quality of data collection and analysis
6. Make response analysis an essential part of any food assistance intervention
7. Develop joint strategies to combine response options appropriately
8. Engage in strategic dialogue and policy convergence on nutrition and food safety
9. Identify quality-quantity tradeoffs and the nutritional impacts of different tools
10. Harmonize standards to ensure food assistance quality and safety
11. Support the new UN Global Food Security Cluster
12. Ensure greater coordination within and among European and U.S. programs
13. Initiate an external review of UN agency food security functions and coordination
14. Enhance food assistance cooperation between the European Commission and the U.S.
15. Improve administrative coherence within the EU and the U.S.

The European Commission and the U.S. government should push for progress on these 15 points, in cooperation with other donors, operational agencies and recipients. Such reform will advance the international community's ability to respond effectively to the food crises that will unfortunately continue to threaten vulnerable populations in the developing world for the foreseeable future.

1. Hunger  
remains  
widespread

# 1. HUNGER REMAINS WIDESPREAD

In 2009, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimated the global number of undernourished to be 925 million persons, more than the populations of the European Union and the United States combined. In addition, at least twice that number suffer from insufficient intake of crucial micronutrients such as iodine, iron, vitamin A and zinc. Undernourishment and deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals cost the lives of more than five million children every year.<sup>1</sup>

The principal reasons for food insecurity are poverty and a lack of agricultural development. Despite welcome increases in global food production and average incomes over the past two generations, no significant progress in reducing hunger and food insecurity in poor countries outside of East Asia has occurred. Hunger remains widespread largely because poverty remains widespread in low- and lower middle-income countries.

Furthermore, natural disasters, conflicts, political unrest and macroeconomic shocks play a destabilizing role, thrusting millions of people each year into food crises characterized by acute undernutrition.

- First, violent conflict remains stubbornly widespread. Libya and Côte d'Ivoire are just the most recent examples of conflicts that have driven people from their homes into camps, disrupted agricultural production and marketing activities and caused shortages even in normally food surplus areas. Conflicts disrupt markets and employment, leaving people without regular sources of income and eating up savings. This pushes many people into acute food insecurity.
- Second, natural disasters are increasing their toll on the poor and vulnerable. The destruction and

suffering from the 2010 Haiti earthquake and the 2010 Pakistan floods may seem exceptional, but between 1990 and 2009 the number of reported disasters rose steadily. In 2009 alone, about 120 million victims were killed or seriously affected by natural disasters worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Climate change is widely expected to further increase the frequency and severity of droughts and hydrometeorological disasters.

- Finally, high food prices have a strong negative effect on the poor. They tend to spend half or more of their income on food, making them very sensitive to price changes. Price spikes such as those seen in 2008 and again in 2011 force the poor to reduce already meager diets. The combination of rapidly growing demand and slowly growing supply, compounded by widespread crop failures that pushed prices to record highs earlier this year, is a pattern likely to continue for some time to come, keeping global food prices high.<sup>3</sup>

The longer-term concerns of chronic hunger and food insecurity are associated with poverty, but food aid and other forms of food assistance are both inadequate in volume and programmatically unsuited to address deeper, structural causes of poverty. Food assistance is, however, a valuable tool for responding to acute undernutrition caused by emergencies and thereby preventing shocks from aggravating the underlying deprivation that causes most food insecurity. The continued and growing need for humanitarian response has prompted considerable efforts in the past decade to improve food assistance policy and practice.

1. FAO. 2010. "The State of Food Insecurity in the World. Addressing food insecurity in protracted crises." Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.
2. Vos, F. et al. 2010. "Annual Disaster Statistical Review 2009." Brussels: Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters.
3. Ivanic, Maros and Will Martin. 2008 "Implications of Higher Global Food Prices for Poverty in Low-Income Countries." Policy Research Working Paper 4594. Washington, DC: World Bank.

## 2. Progress and the changing use of food aid

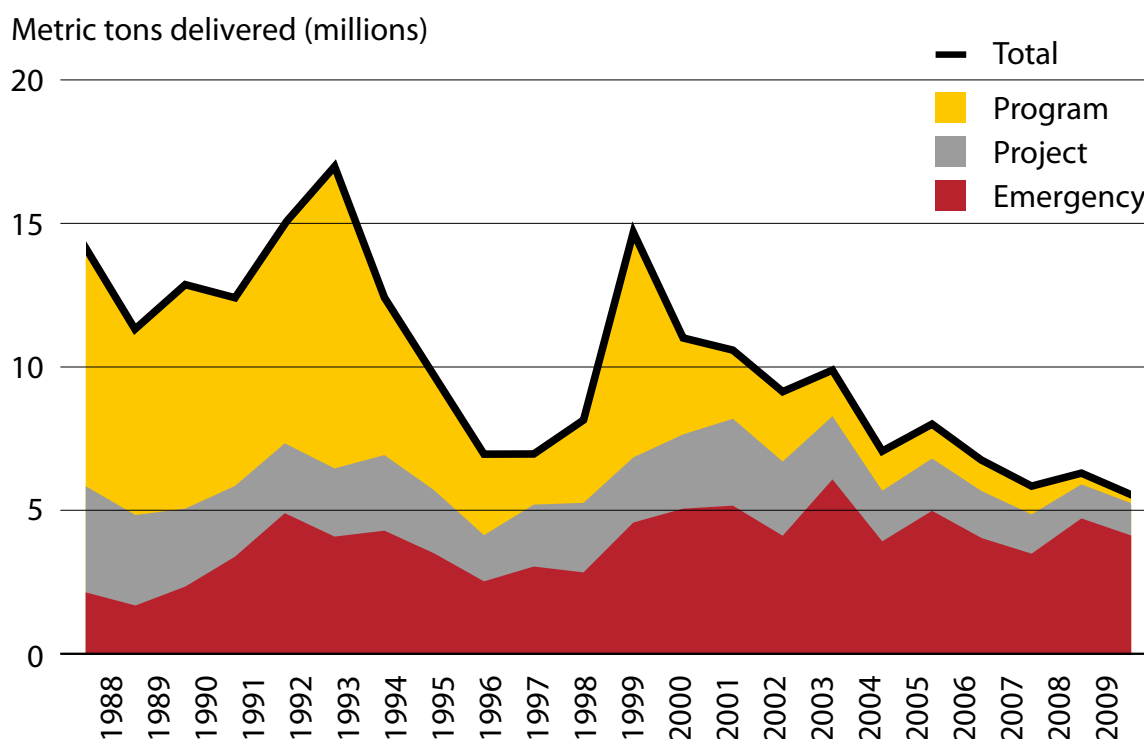


## 2. PROGRESS AND THE CHANGING USE OF FOOD AID

Global hunger is not a recent phenomenon. The international community has been providing millions of tons of food aid for decades in an attempt to help address this problem. International food aid used to be essentially a single tool applied to every sort of food insecurity, chronic or acute. Most commodities were shipped from donor country governments to recipient country governments, who typically sold rather than distributed the commodities and

used the revenues for general budget support. Occasionally, recipient governments allotted food to schools, maternal and child health programs or related development projects. When crises struck, donor governments shipped the same commodities – this time labeled “emergency food aid” – to affected countries, no matter how ill- or well-suited they were to the situation.

Figure 1: Global Food Aid Flows (1988 – 2009)



Source: WFP Food Aid Information System

Food aid has evolved significantly over the past decade. Sharply reduced volumes of government-held food surpluses in donor countries have led to a dramatic fall – by more than half – in global food aid volumes. As shown in figure 1, government-to-gov-

ernment program food aid support has largely ended and been replaced by emergency shipments to respond to humanitarian emergencies.

There has also been a clear shift in thinking about food insecurity, the causes of hunger and the best way to administer help. Rather than the one-size-fits-all, supply-driven approach predicated on food availability through the 1970s, the emphasis since the 1990s has been steadily shifting toward demand-side issues of access and utilization by vulnerable people. This shift to what is now called “food assistance” rather than simply “food aid” is characterized by four major trends:

### **Trend 1: Greater focus on emergency situations**

The use of food aid as a tool for longer-term development assistance has fallen out of favor. Research and practice have reinforced longstanding beliefs that in-kind food transfers are ill-suited for addressing chronic poverty and food insecurity, with perhaps a few exceptions to the rule, such as school feeding programs. Yet, food transfers can have high impact when responding to humanitarian crises. The result has been a dramatic reorientation of global food aid toward emergencies and areas of the greatest immediate need. For example:

- In the 1980s, less than 20 percent of food aid flowed in response to emergencies, but by 2008–9, the figure had risen to more than 75 percent.
- Protracted emergencies – many of which couple political unrest or violence with persistent poverty and poorly functioning agricultural markets – now draw roughly two-thirds of emergency food aid.
- The most crisis-ravaged continent, Africa, absorbed 70 percent of global food aid flows in 2008–9. A decade earlier it received only about one-third of all shipments.

### **Trend 2: Proliferating response options**

In order to speed up delivery and reduce costs, donors now buy many more commodities in the developing world, a practice known as local or regional purchase or procurement (LRP). They also now choose among a wider assortment of special food products used to address the varied nutritional needs of distinct target subpopulations in different

contexts. The food basket has changed markedly, as wheat and wheat flour have declined from nearly 80 percent of global food aid in the 1970s to around 25 percent by 2009. This reflects the decline of donor country domestic farm support programs that generated large government-owned wheat stocks, which donors sought to dispose of abroad. It also reflects the growing recognition of the diverse nutritional needs of target subpopulations. Fortified and blended foods have boosted the nutritional content of general, supplemental and complementary rations, and highly nutritious ready-to-use foods have revolutionized the treatment of severe acute undernutrition.

Instead of in-kind food, donors now increasingly use cash and voucher transfers, even in emergencies. A growing body of evidence shows that non-food transfers are often – though not always – best-bet responses to food crises in places where food markets function well and food insecurity is attributable primarily to access problems.

### **Trend 3: Expanding attention to information collection and analysis**

To ensure that food assistance reaches the right people at the right time and in the most appropriate form, donors and implementing agencies have professionalized the way they collect, analyze and use information. Early warning systems, needs assessments and response analysis methods have improved over the past decade, although it remains unclear how best to implement and link these distinct information products. Donors and operational agencies have recognized the importance of high quality, internationally comparable information for designing and prioritizing context-specific, evidence-based responses. They have therefore invested considerably in developing and deploying reliable data collection and analysis tools. One example is the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, which receives funding from multiple donors and exemplifies a multilateral effort to close the information gap.

**Trend 4: Increasingly multilateral and professional food assistance delivery**

The rise of emergency food aid, especially in response to complex emergencies, has resulted in increasingly multilateral and professional food aid deliveries. Over the past decade, the World Food Programme (WFP) has become the clear global leader in food aid deliveries. Close to 70 percent of all food assistance deliveries were channeled through the WFP in 2009. The WFP's rise has gone hand in hand with better coordinated emergency responses and an increased use of new food assistance tools. It is the single most important hub for operational innovations in food assistance more generally.

While donors have strikingly different histories of food aid provision and face different political constraints at home, the broad objectives of food aid and food assistance seem to have broadly aligned over the past decade or so following the four trends just described. Donors may at times have viewed food aid as an outlet for disposing of commodity surpluses, or as a tool for agricultural export promotion, geopolitical manipulation or recipient country development financing. But in the last decade, all major donors have focused their food assistance policies on food emergencies.

3. Key challenges  
and why the  
EU and the U.S.  
should take the  
lead

## 3. KEY CHALLENGES AND WHY THE EU AND THE U.S. SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD

Despite significant advances in the policy and practice of food assistance, donors, UN organizations and NGOs still face major challenges. Shortcomings in the implementation of international best practices still limit the impact of food assistance. Moreover, the increased complexity of international food assistance – with more players and tools – raises both the risks of donor discord or duplication of effort and the need for coordination and convergence in practices in order to respond appropriately to food crises. Three key and mutually reinforcing problems inhibit more effective food assistance:

### **Outdated international governance**

In spite of the fundamental changes of the past decade, the main international institutions guiding food assistance are largely relics of a bygone era of program food aid based on donor commodity surplus disposal. The outdated global food assistance architecture hinders progress in utilizing increasingly scarce food assistance resources to respond to acute undernutrition crises. A lack of vision and donor coherence has sparked tensions, as seen in the ongoing renegotiation of the Food Aid Convention and in the surprisingly contentious place of food aid in the agricultural section of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Doha Round negotiations.

### **Gaps in matching needs and resources**

Practitioners agree that needs assessments, carefully targeted responses and nutritional quality are key factors for efficient and effective food assistance. Responses nonetheless still depend on what resources donors can provide and what implementing partners can manage more than on what is needed by at-risk populations. It remains difficult to match assessed needs and best-bet responses with the resources that donors can make available. Food assistance continues to be resource driven, even though the range – although not the value – of resources available has increased over time.

### **Difficulties in pursuing a twin-track approach to food security**

Humanitarian response focuses on saving lives and alleviating short-term suffering. As a result, emergency food assistance responses often neglect longer-term, structural issues that drive chronic food insecurity or vulnerability. Donors and operational agencies clearly recognize the need to link short-term humanitarian assistance with longer-term promotion of food security, as evidenced by the 2009 Rome Principles. Agreed to by all FAO member states, that declaration strives for a comprehensive twin-track approach to food security that consists of both direct action to immediately tackle hunger for the most vulnerable and longer-term sustainable programs to eliminate the root causes of hunger and poverty. The gap between rhetoric and reality, however, remains wide. Innovation is urgently needed to better integrate food assistance for acute undernutrition with agricultural research and capacity building. Such steps could enhance the functioning of local, national and regional food marketing systems and lead to more effective social protection schemes.

These problems are to a great extent transatlantic, since the European Commission, the EU member states and the U.S. government together provide more than 65 percent of global food assistance. Their policies and actions shape norms, policies and practices of food assistance worldwide. The European Commission and the U.S. thus play a key role in changing and improving food assistance. They must forge an active transatlantic partnership and work with other donors, operating agencies and recipients to address these stumbling blocks and find innovative solutions to the complex and urgent business of food assistance. With global needs rising and resources shrinking, transatlantic cooperation and leadership are essential for finding solutions and achieving more effective and efficient use of scarce resources.

# 4. Agenda for action

## 4. AGENDA FOR ACTION

The analysis summarized above implies specific actions that could help improve the effectiveness of international food assistance. Below we flesh out these actions and group our recommendations under four headings: international governance, needs-based food assistance, linking relief and development and, as an enabling condition, donor cooperation.

### International governance

Food assistance at the global level faces serious structural problems. Key institutions such as the Food Aid Convention (FAC) or the FAO Consultative Sub-committee on Surplus Disposal (CSSD) have not adapted to the past decade's considerable changes in food assistance policy and practice. The European Commission, EU member states and the U.S. government need to provide leadership in adapting the global food assistance architecture to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### ► Recommendation 1: Reform the outdated Food Aid Convention

Under the Food Aid Convention, the only international treaty focused on food assistance, major food aid donors have committed themselves to minimum levels of annual food aid donations. The last renegotiation of the FAC, in 1999, needs substantial overhaul in order to match prevailing practices in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- The convention should strengthen its support for needs-based and situation-dependent humanitarian food assistance. Signatories should expand the types of food assistance transfers that can be counted against their commitments. Ultimately, this gives signatories incentives to use more context-appropriate responses. This should include new tools like cash and voucher transfers and micronutrient rich products as well as measures designed to strengthen agricultural resilience in the aftermath of emergencies.

- Signatories should move from a tonnage-based commitment structure to a much more flexible cash-based accounting system. In order to ensure that the risk of rising food prices is not transferred to food insecure recipients, commitments should be adjusted for inflation as reflected in the FAO food price index.

#### ► Recommendation 2: Close the FAO Consultative Sub-committee on Surplus Disposal

The transatlantic partners should close the FAO Consultative Sub-committee on Surplus Disposal in order to redirect scarce resources and policy-maker attention to more pressing concerns.

The CSSD is an antiquated remnant of the surplus disposal-oriented food aid system really only operative from the 1950s through the 1970s. Its role was to ensure that food aid does not displace other commercial imports, but this safeguard logic has long been a fiction. It was instituted as a political appeasement to other commercial competitors and lacks any mechanism for enforcement. In any case, the vast majority of food aid shipments are now for emergencies and thus exempt from the CSSD's scrutiny.

Donor food aid shipments are now reported through alternative channels, both to the Food Aid Convention to ensure compliance with that treaty's obligations and through the WFP's Food Aid Information System, rendering CSSD reporting redundant. Closing the CSSD would be an important symbolic act, signaling that donors recognize that food assistance has changed fundamentally and that its global institutional architecture must as well.



### ► Recommendation 3: Agree on definitions of emergency food aid in the WTO negotiations

Food aid remains hotly debated in WTO negotiations, with disagreement between Europe and the U.S. especially over aid sourced in the donor country, known as tied food aid. Europe and many other WTO member states consider tied food aid an unfair export subsidy. The U.S. and many recipient states deem it a humanitarian transfer outside the commercial trade system. This divergence may not prevent closer cooperation on the operational level, but it impacts the way the transatlantic partners view food aid at the political level. It is essential to reach agreement in the current WTO trade negotiations on the conditions under which in-kind food aid is exempt from trade disciplines. The transatlantic partners need to agree on definitions of emergency situations and what goes in a food aid “safe box” so as to resolve the food aid-related deadlock in the WTO negotiations.

### Needs-based food assistance

Careful information gathering and analysis in food assistance are essential for efficiently delivering scarce resources to those in need at the right time, in the right place and in the most appropriate form. Food assistance requires comprehensive assessment capacities and, as a next step, the flexibility to choose among a range of tools and food products. To ensure that future food assistance is more systematically based on evidence about needs and context, the European Commission and the U.S. government should take the following steps.

### ► Recommendation 4: Improve information gathering and its use

- Improving the relevance and use of information tools requires initiative from the European Commission and the U.S. government in a number of areas: The European Commission Humanitarian Aid and

Civil Protection Office (ECHO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) could strengthen coordination within their administrations. That would help to link different types of knowledge and information about food insecurity and improve multi-sectorial programming.

- The European Commission could better coordinate its policy and practice on needs assessments with EU member states. More coherent European approaches will help consolidate and improve food assistance assessments at the global level as well.
- The transatlantic donors should turn their attention to promoting integrated approaches to information gathering and analysis. At the outset, the transatlantic partners could ask the Global Food Security Cluster to initiate an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of existing tools and methods, including current global needs assessment initiatives. On the basis of this evaluation, the transatlantic partners could support the global cluster in promoting identified good practices among cluster members to avoid duplication and to encourage compatibility among tools.
- The transatlantic partners helped individually and collectively to build the capacity of implementing organizations to gather and analyze information. They should continue this engagement with a particular focus on response analysis and the capacity of smaller organizations.
- The transatlantic partners should support research on and piloting of new technologies such as high resolution satellite imagery and crowd sourcing through mobile telephone services in order to increase the timeliness, range and accuracy of data collection.
- The transatlantic partners should make use of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative to enhance linkages with emerging donors such as South Africa, South Korea, India, Brazil and Saudi Arabia; and then create a dialogue with emerging donors on information gathering and use from a donor perspective.



### ► Recommendation 5: Jointly push for greater involvement of local actors

Creating a more inclusive information gathering and analysis system that involves, where appropriate, national governments, local actors, civil society and the affected population is no small challenge. Yet it promises significant benefits in the quality and availability of primary data and will be indispensable for developing longer-term solutions to food insecurity. The European Commission and USAID could:

- Help build the capacity to gather and use information from government and civil society representatives in countries affected by high levels of food insecurity and then actively seek input from those organizations to improve needs assessment and response analysis, as well as secure increased local ownership over food assistance programming.
- Work with the WFP and FAO at the country level to ensure that the food security cluster cooperate with, or ideally is integrated into, national structures.
- Include affected populations in information processes by supporting initiatives such as Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities, which has worked in Haiti and Pakistan, as well as by supporting the WFP and other operational agencies to reach out to recipients about food assistance strategies, distribution times and rations.

### ► Recommendation 6: Make response analysis an essential part of any food assistance intervention

Much of the food assistance literature advocates one particular response tool over another, such as cash versus in-kind aid or local and regional procurement versus transoceanic delivery. However, the advantages and disadvantages of each tool depend on the context of an intervention, and on its objectives. No single tool can meet all objectives in all contexts. Food assistance tools should therefore

be viewed as complementary rather than opposing choices. Increased use of *ex ante* analysis of the likely impacts and outcomes of different response options should become a priority for all donor and implementing agencies. A stronger evidence base is needed to better inform response analysis and the choices and trade-offs between different food assistance tools. This will also require greater political commitment to using response analysis to guide food assistance resource allocation.

### ► Recommendation 7: Develop joint strategies to combine response options appropriately

Challenges arise from the proliferation of actors involved in food assistance, each facing different requirements and constraints from donors and each offering different skills and experience. No agency has expertise in every food assistance tool or in every location. It is important to engage the relative strengths and expertise of different donors and implementing agencies through coordination. The expanding food assistance toolbox offers new opportunities but it also places new demands on coordination at many levels: at the international level; nationally within recipient countries; among implementing agencies; and pertaining to specific tools and responses. Donors need to seize opportunities to better coordinate the sharing of data, market information, needs assessments, response analysis and best practices in implementation.

### ► Recommendation 8: Engage in strategic dialogue and policy convergence on nutrition and food safety

The European Commission and the U.S. government should make nutritional outcomes a stated goal in their food assistance interventions. This will require cross-sector coordination to account for other contributors to human health. In particular:

- The transatlantic partners must provide clear guidance on the nutritional specifications, most appropriate uses and the expected nutritional impacts of blended, fortified or highly nutritious products. For example, operational agencies sometimes struggle to choose from an expanding variety of fortified blended foods and nutritionally enhanced food products (for instance, corn-soy blend, ready-to-use foods or lipid-based food supplements). They may also have a difficult time distinguishing between different formulations of the same foods (for instance, corn-soy blend from WFP, USAID or the United Nations Children's Fund).
- ECHO and USAID should also provide guidance on the likely nutritional impacts of different food assistance distribution tools; they should also work together to document best practices for combining products and distribution processes to achieve a particular program's nutritional objectives.

### ► Recommendation 9: Identify quality-quantity tradeoffs and the nutritional impacts of different tools

Rigorously defining quality-quantity tradeoffs in food assistance must become a priority for ECHO and USAID. If food assistance programs use relatively expensive, nutrient-dense foods to achieve outcomes that could actually have been achieved using less expensive, less nutritionally dense foods, then program efficiency is unnecessarily reduced. This may result in the unnecessary exclusion of needy persons from the recipient population. Likewise, if food assistance programs are providing foods of a quality insufficient to achieve intended nutritional outcomes, or if that food is unsafe, then the food assistance is rendered ineffective for the program's nutrition- and health-related objectives. The European Commission and the U.S. government should evaluate the extent to which spending more on food quality and safety in food assistance will result in better outcomes among target populations, and in what circumstances lower cost alternatives would be adequate to achieve a particular program's objectives.

### ► Recommendation 10: Harmonize standards to ensure food assistance quality and safety

The European Commission and the U.S. government must prevent the distribution of contaminated food to already nutritionally vulnerable populations. The threat of food contamination exists in food assistance as it does elsewhere in the global commercial food supply. Effective safeguards against potential microbial and chemical hazards in food are necessary.

- ECHO and USAID should rigorously adhere to a set of minimum international standards, such as the Codex Alimentarius, which is superseded when donors and recipient countries have national standards in place. When important standards do not exist, or are insufficient, such as with respect to some mycotoxins in cereal products, the transatlantic partners should jointly set new standards.
- In the face of conflicting food safety standards, or in the absence of standards altogether, the European Commission and the U.S. government must provide guidance about how to determine the quality and safety of all food assistance products. This should include appropriate protocols for disposing of contaminated food and thresholds below which products become inconsumable.
- The European Commission and the U.S. government should emphasize the importance of accountability for food safety to all partners involved in the food assistance supply chain. To this end, the transatlantic partners should jointly develop feedback mechanisms for recipients and field agencies to report on food safety issues that may impede the effectiveness of food assistance programs.

## Linking relief and development

The international food assistance community needs to work harder to link humanitarian assistance to longer-term development strategies, which in turn will strengthen resilience and eliminate the struc-

tural causes of food insecurity and poverty. To improve such linkages and help advance a twin-track approach, the European Commission and the U.S. government should define opportunities and methods to better combine food assistance in acute emergencies with rehabilitation and agricultural and nutritional development.

### ► Recommendation 11: Support the new UN Global Food Security Cluster

At an operational level the newly established global food security cluster has the potential to address, and coordinate long- and short-term responses to, food insecurity through multilateral coordination. The European Commission and the U.S. government should support this mechanism financially and politically because it has promise to better link food assistance with rehabilitation and prevention.

### ► Recommendation 12: Ensure greater coordination within and among European and U.S. programs

The different approaches and instruments used to address emergency and chronic food insecurity within the European Commission and the EU member states, as well as within the U.S. government, often result in funding gaps between emergency and development projects. To reduce such gaps, we recommend the following:

- Within their administrations, ECHO and USAID should strengthen their ties with related agencies with humanitarian or development mandates. Improved coordination within and among the respective units will help to link different types of knowledge and information about food insecurity and to improve multi-sectoral programming, which is essential in addressing acute and chronic food insecurity.
- In conjunction with greater coordination within each administration, the transatlantic partners should undertake a joint review to identify where

linkages between the European Commission and USAID are desirable and feasible, and where not, in order to develop strategies to maximize the benefits of linking relief, rehabilitation and development.

### ► Recommendation 13: Initiate an external review of UN agency food security functions and coordination

The European Commission and the U.S. government should institute comparative external reviews of the various food assistance projects and programs undertaken by the United Nations' food and agricultural organizations. These reviews should clarify agency missions, reduce costly duplication of effort and enhance complementarity of functions. They should include an analysis of the WFP, UNICEF and FAO emergency functions, which are essential to relief and recovery, as well as programs to reduce chronic food insecurity run by the FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the United Nations Development Programme and the WFP.

## Donor cooperation

Increased cooperation and policy convergence between the European Commission and the U.S. government can accelerate the identification and uptake of global best practices, as can increased policy coherence within Europe and the U.S.

### ► Recommendation 14: Enhance food assistance cooperation between the EC and the U.S.

More frequent coordination between ECHO and USAID can further accelerate the progress seen over the past decade in food assistance policy and practice. The following steps could strengthen the coherence of programs and actions and enhance mutual learning.

- The transatlantic partners should arrange high-level bilateral meetings to resolve lingering political issues concerning food assistance. There remains misunderstanding on both sides about, and too little appreciation of, the potential complementarity between their different food assistance policies. The European Commission and the U.S. government could resurrect the High-Level Consultation Group on development and humanitarian assistance to ensure that food assistance is placed high on the agenda.
- Routine coordination at the headquarters level between USAID and ECHO needs to increase. Bilateral working groups on specific food assistance issues together with development colleagues can help develop comprehensive approaches linking humanitarian relief to development.
- USAID and ECHO need to strengthen cooperation at the field level to enhance efficiency and impact, not least by taking advantage of complementary information sources, resources and technical capacities. It would make sense to start by evaluating previous collaborations, such as in Niger in 2010.
- Develop joint knowledge management systems to counter problems caused by rapid staff turnover at both ECHO and USAID. Coupled with joint training and missions, the public-good potential of information and analyses can improve performance in each agency.

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### ► Recommendation 15: Improve administrative coherence within the EU and the U.S.

One of the greatest challenges to improved EU-U.S. cooperation and coordination is the lack of coherence within both the EU and the U.S. around food assistance policy. Food assistance is offered by multiple parties within both Europe and the U.S. without a clearly coordinated mission and bureaucratic home, too often resulting in diffuse, uncoordinated activity and sometimes contradictory policies. European Commission policies are not always consist-

ent with those of individual member states. This can make coordination difficult, as shown for example in internal disagreements around renegotiation of the FAC. Within the U.S., foreign assistance has become increasingly dispersed across the federal government as USAID's staffing and technical capacity have shrunk dramatically over the past generation. Both sides of the Atlantic must continuously strive to improve food assistance policy coherence among their relevant stakeholders.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This paper summarizes a 15-month collaborative research project between Cornell University in the U.S. and the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Germany. Drawing on our prior experiences, researchers from both institutions gathered on four different occasions to review the literature and share their individual and collective experiences related to global food assistance. Two of our meetings involved a broader set of experts in events we termed Transatlantic Dialogues on Humanitarian Action. At the first meeting, in Potsdam, Germany, in July 2010, our team presented the research framework and – in close collaboration with participating researchers, policymakers, humanitarian practitioners and other stakeholders – further refined key research questions for the project. At the second meeting, held in Warrenton, Virginia, in March 2011, we presented and vetted our research results, developing and refining our resulting recommendations. A companion research volume, scheduled for publication at the end of 2012, provides extensive supporting data and analysis.

*For more information and forthcoming publications, please see: [www.gppi.net](http://www.gppi.net).*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Andrea Binder** is Associate Director of the Global Public Policy Institute, Berlin. Her areas of expertise include humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and global security. She currently heads GPPi's "Uniting on Food Assistance" project together with Julia Steets (GPPi) and recently conducted the Inter-Agency Real Time Evaluation of the Emergency Response to the Haiti Earthquake. Andrea has field experience in Ghana and Sri Lanka and evaluation experience in Central African Republic, the DRC, Haiti and Uganda. Prior to joining GPPi in 2006, Andrea worked as a lecturer in International Relations at the University Tübingen, Germany. Andrea studied political science, economics, and rhetoric at the universities of Augsburg, and Tübingen, Germany; the Graduate Institute of International Studies HEI, Geneva; and the Institut d'études Politiques de Paris, France.

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**Cynthia Mathys** is a research support specialist at Cornell University. She holds an M.P.S. in International Agriculture and Rural Development from Cornell and a B.S. in Environmental Policy & Behavior from the University of Michigan. Her Master's thesis at Cornell focused on "pro-poor" biodiesel production in India. For the four years prior to coming to Cornell Cynthia was the Director of an organic agriculture company based in New Delhi, India, and in this capacity she oversaw agricultural projects in both India and Nepal. Cynthia has also worked in South Africa with Market Matters Inc., an NGO that builds capacity among African agribusiness entrepreneurs.

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**Joanna Upton** is currently working on a Ph.D. in Applied Economics and Management at Cornell, where her research investigates food markets in sub-Saharan Africa. She seeks in particular to understand how development and humanitarian policy, such as local and regional procurement, interacts with and influences food markets. While initially a scholar of music and linguistics, Joanna switched her focus to poverty alleviation while living and travelling in West Africa. She lived in Niger for four years and worked with a small non-profit on primary education and health programs. She returned to the U.S. to pursue a Masters degree from The Fletcher School at Tufts, where her thesis research focused on institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Kira Villa** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University where she also received her Master's degree. Her primary research interests include issues surrounding health, nutrition and early childhood development in developing countries. Her master's research focused on nutritional determinants and behaviors in pastoralist households in East Africa. Kira is currently interested in exploring the effects of early childhood health and home environments on human capital development and is especially interested in the special circumstances faced by orphans and other vulnerable children.

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