
Food Aid: the Involvement of the United Kingdom¹

Although the United Kingdom is a net food importer, about £75 mn will be attributed to the United Kingdom's Aid Programme in the financial year ending 31st March 1983 in respect of food aid. There are three elements of this:

European Community's Community Actions

In their 1982 regular food aid programme, the EC committed 1 mn tonnes of cereals, 150,000 tonnes of dried skimmed milk powder and 45,000 tonnes of butteroil. Finance comes from the EC's budget,

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the resources for which originate from member states and that coming from the United Kingdom (about 1/3) is attributed to the UK Aid Programme (about £64 mn for financial year 1982/83).

Food Aid Convention National Actions

The EC's overall minimum obligation under the 1980 Food Aid Convention (1,650,000 tonnes of cereals) is divided between 'Community Actions' (927,663 tonnes managed by the Commission, with oversight by the Council of Ministers, and paid for out of the Community budget) and 'National Actions' (722,337 tonnes) managed by member



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Refugee camp shelter part made with 'aid' sacks, Somalia.

states and paid for out of national budgets. The UK's share of national actions is 117,296 tonnes and expenditure this financial year is estimated at £10 mn.

World Food Programme

The UK has pledged £2 mn in cash and commodities to WFP's regular programme in biennium 1981/82. Expenditure in the financial year ending 31st March 1983 is estimated at £1 mn.

EC Community Actions

This is, in volume and financial terms, the most important element of the United Kingdom's food aid involvement. The programme is managed by staff of the Agriculture, Food and Environment Division of the General Directorate VIII in the EC Commission. The interinstitutional relationship of responsibility in the EC is a complex matter but, in general, it can be said that the Commission makes proposals on the size, list of eligible countries and agencies, and commodity breakdown of the annual programme and on a variety of policy issues relating to it and the Council of Ministers reacts to such proposals. Under a newly agreed regulation the Commission decides, after consulting a management committee of representatives from member states, on quantities to be allocated to approved recipients.

Table 1

UK expenditure on 'national actions' food aid and WFP biennial pledges¹

<i>financial year</i>	<i>national actions expenditure (£)</i>	<i>WFP pledge expenditure (£)</i>
1977/78	5,804,698	1,865,874
1978/79	13,832,283	879,090
1979/80	9,538,213	3,701,311
1980/81	11,950,244	2,257,801
1981/82	13,887,870	3,365,773

¹Does not include estimated cost of UK financial contribution to EEC food aid by 'Community action'.

It is sometimes alleged that the main purpose of the Community's food aid programme is the disposal of surplus European food production. Whatever justification there might have been for such an allegation in the past it is not the case now. All member states and the Commission are agreed that the prime consideration of food aid is to help with the social and/or economic development of developing countries, and criteria related to this consideration are used in determining the allocation. The main problem is how to achieve this most effectively. The Community is trying to improve its programming by endeavouring to integrate food aid more effectively into other aspects of its development aid programme and in particular to harness it towards assistance to indigenous agricultural production.

Food Aid Convention National Actions

The objectives of our national actions food aid are similar to the Community's objectives of assisting with developing countries' economic and social development. In allocating to recipient countries and organisations we usually award a substantial part to WFP (50,000 tonnes to regular programme and 5,000 tonnes to the International Emergency Food Reserve this year), some to UNRWA, UNHCR and the balance bilaterally to governments of developing countries. The bilateral allocations are determined by an assessment of a country's food deficit, relative poverty and the use to be made of the food aid. In some cases our bilateral allocations are provided for free distribution or for use in food-for-work schemes but more often they are provided for sale on the internal market. In the latter cases, the proceeds of sale (counterpart funds) are tied to use in development projects as separately agreed by donor and recipient.

The World Food Programme

The UK normally supports WFP both through biennial cash and commodity pledges and by awarding a significant part of its Food Aid Convention obligations to WFP. In general, it considers that WFP's Food For Work and Feeding Vulnerable group projects represent — in a very difficult area of developmental aid — an effective attempt to relate food aid to social and economic development.

A Statement on Food Aid by the Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme

As the world economic situation has worsened, an increasing number of developing countries, and especially the poorest among them, have experienced acute difficulties. Food production has not kept pace with population growth in some regions, particularly in Africa. Foreign exchange earnings from the exports of primary agricultural products have declined with the fall in demand in industrialised countries and the downward trend in commodity prices. On the other hand, the cost of essential imports has continued to rise and the burden of debt servicing has become heavier.

Needy countries are therefore finding it increasingly difficult to import their food requirements on commercial terms. At the same time they are having to adopt structural adjustment programmes to redirect their economies, which can cause increased hardship for the poorer sections of their populations in the short run. While it is widely accepted that the solution to the problem of food shortages in the developing countries lies in increasing production in those countries and in strengthening self-reliance in food, these objectives cannot be achieved overnight. Higher producer prices may be vital to stimulate domestic food production. Decreased food subsidies may be essential to a struggling economy. But many poor people with already inadequate food or incomes, including mothers and children —nutritionally the most vulnerable groups — will be hard hit by the resultant higher consumer prices unless some form of buffer can be found.

Food aid has been an important, often vital, form of external assistance for the low-income countries during the 1970s. It has played an important role not only because of the amount of such aid available but also because of its direct relevance to improving the conditions of the poorest sections of the population, particularly in rural areas.

The bulk of food aid (about 65-70 per cent) has been provided bilaterally as programme assistance on a government to government basis. This form of food aid has helped developing countries meet their food needs and their food import requirements, thereby contributing to a reduction in their adverse balance of payments position and to maintaining or increasing consumption levels.

Project food aid, which is specifically directed to reach target groups of people and to support identified development objectives, has often given a lead in addressing the problems of the poor in tangible ways and in enhancing the human element in the development process. It has also been a resource for pursuing the goals of self-sufficiency and self-reliance in recipient countries, particularly through its support to agricultural and rural development projects and to programmes of nutritional improvement. Food aid is also playing a significant role in the growing number and scale of emergency situations around the world and, where appropriate, can help in establishing and maintaining food reserves and food security schemes in developing countries.

However, food aid is not a panacea and if misused or mis-directed it can have counter-productive effects by creating disincentives for agricultural production in recipient countries and disruption of trade in food commodities locally and internationally. Food aid is best used in the context of recipient governments' policies and programmes that explicitly seek to increase food production and food security and to improve the conditions of the poorest segments of their population. Moreover, its maximum impact is achieved when it is provided as part of a package of financial, technical and material assistance.

The World Food Conference which took place in Rome in November 1974 emphasised the need to arrive at an improved policy for food aid which would not only ensure adequate provision of food aid but also would bring about a coordination of national and international food aid policies and programmes. The Committee on Food Aid Policies and Programmes

(CFA) was established as a result of a resolution of that Conference to provide a forum for intergovernmental consultation and proposals on all food aid. The CFA approved a set of Guidelines and Criteria for Food Aid in May 1979 which provide a policy framework so that food aid from all sources can make an effective contribution to the solution of the food problem of developing countries.

The World Food Programme (WFP), which is the food aid arm of the United Nations system, has been in the business of providing project food aid for the past 20 years. Using food aid to increase investment and promote well-based development has been a distinctive mandate of the Programme over the past two decades of its operations. As a pioneer in the project approach to food aid, WFP has been an early exponent of agricultural and rural development and of labour-intensive works. The Programme's experience with food aid has been, on the whole, a very positive one, as can be judged from the numerous evaluation reports of the projects it has supported. There have been cases of poor use, sometimes misuse, of this form of aid, which is a difficult but powerful contributor to development, but such cases are not common and are, I believe, decreasing. This is not to imply that there is no room for improvement. On the contrary, the everyday experience of the Programme is taken into account in a continuous process of refinement. Basically, what the Programme is seeking to achieve is to provide effective support to development projects which are not palliative but which are directed at the root causes of poverty, the mainspring of hunger and malnutrition. WFP is therefore continuously seeking to improve the design of the projects it supports, in association with the specialised agencies of the United Nations system, and to improve the delivery system by which its food aid is provided at least cost and with greater efficiency.

In particular the WFP recognises that the evaluation of project performance and impact has an important role in increasing the operational effectiveness of its own activities and food aid more generally. It has been recognised that in addition to regular evaluation there is much to be learned from selective in-depth assessments of particular projects. For example, the WFP in cooperation with the Government of Bangladesh and with support from many agencies has sponsored a major study of food for work projects in Bangladesh. There is also an opportunity in such contexts for the community of social scientists to make a valuable contribution. More careful scientific studies of food aid and food aid related activities such as mother and child or school nutrition projects will increase our understanding of these activities, their possibilities and problems. Such knowledge will ultimately bring enhanced benefits from food aid through improvements in the design and operational management of food aid projects.

All the indications are that food aid will continue to be an essential element in international cooperation throughout the 1980s, and that food aid should be deployed in ways which contribute to lasting improvement and development rather than create a state of dependency. It is sobering to note, however, that at a time of increasing need, and of abundance of food in the main food exporting developed countries, food aid continues to decline. Moreover, in these difficult times strong multilateral organisations which genuinely promote cooperation between developed and developing countries are more than ever needed.

The Rome Declaration on Hunger, which was issued on World Food Day (16 October) 1982, includes the statement:

More food aid should be provided, on a stable and predictable basis, particularly through international channels, not just to meet emergencies, but to promote development, care being taken to avoid disincentive to domestic food production.

I urge the nations of the world to respond quickly and generously to that statement.

James C. Ingram,
Executive Director, World Food Programme, Rome
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