TRENDS IN FOOD FOR DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF NGOS
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Since World War II, not-for-profit, international nongovernmental organizations with operations in food insecure regions (referred to in this paper as “NGOs”) have designed food aid programs in collaboration with local communities and entities and delivered food to targeted populations. NGOs raise money for these purposes, advocate for donor countries to contribute food aid to assist poor and hungry populations, and apply for and implement programs sponsored by donor countries and organizations. One of their greatest contributions since the 1980’s has been a focus on “food for development” in poor, crisis prone areas, which entails linking food aid to community capacity-building to achieve sustainable improvements in health, nutrition, livelihoods and food and agricultural systems. As total food aid levels fall, a greater proportion is used for emergencies and donors rely more heavily on intergovernmental organizations to deliver that aid. As a result, the role of the NGO constituency is in flux and, despite positive evaluations of and lessons learned from food for development programs, opportunities for designing and implementing those types of programs are diminishing.

FAO reports that global hunger has been reduced by 167 million over the past decade, but 795 million people are still undernourished, based on the probability that a person randomly selected from a particular area will consume less than her/his caloric requirement. According to FAO’s calculations, 98 percent of undernourished people live developing countries and 63 percent are in Southern Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond calories, dietary quality and nutritional well-being are also necessary for physical and cognitive development and leading a healthy, productive life. Thus, tackling such conditions as low birth weight, underweight and micronutrient deficiencies in children under five, overweight in children over five, anemia and Vitamin A deficiencies is also critical.

Consuming the right foods in the right amounts to meet nutritional needs requires a set of preconditions: availability, affordability and a consumer’s ability to obtain, consume and utilize the nutrients from food. Finding solutions to hunger and malnutrition for a defined population requires consideration of all of these factors and encompasses both short- and long-term measures. This is where food for development makes a difference.

The United States leads the world in food aid commitments – 66% or $1.6 billion of donor pledges, the European Union and its Members is the next largest donor, with 17 percent. The United States also has a history of supporting food for development through programs implemented by not-for-profit NGOs under the Food for Peace (P.L. 480) Title II program.

An in-depth study of over 100 Title II development programs from 2002-2009 found that they improved nutrition of young children and increased household incomes and access to food in very poor, food insecure areas:

“…Title II development programs can indeed reduce undernutrition in young children, improve a number of important maternal and child health and nutrition outcomes, and increase household access to income and food. Most importantly, many children are alive and have been spared ill health and lifelong disabilities thanks to Title II. Stunting in children under 5 years of age fell on average 1.32 percentage points per year with delivery of MCHN services provided by Title II. Improvements in household diets and incomes took place in more than three-quarters of the programs that reported on these indicators.”

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Over the past decade, Title II development programs have also incorporated measures of resilience, supporting and measuring the outcome of social empowerment and capacity building to help communities mitigate, manage and withstand crises, ultimately reducing the need for emergency food assistance.5

Despite these positive findings, just as total food aid levels have declined, so has food for development, with allocations dropping from 61% of Title II in 1992 to 20% in 2010.6 The challenge ahead is elaborating their successful developmental approaches and establishing a pathway for continuing and scaling their impact. Investments in these programs and greater opportunity for process evaluations, as well as impact evaluations, are both needed.


5. See, for example: United States Agency for International Development. 2015. Request for Proposals, Fiscal Year 2015 Title II Development Food Assistance Projects for Bangladesh and Mali. 2015