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Food aid needs in developing countries

by Gene Mathia and Margaret Missiaen

Nutrition shortfalls vary greatly among less developed countries, and so too does the success of food aid in reducing malnutrition. The variation in map shading shows the degree to which food aid meets the shortfall between nutritional requirements and food supplies in sixty developing countries. The darkest shaded countries have the greatest nutritional gap, even after food aid. The lightest shaded countries receive enough food aid to eliminate, or even more than meet, the nutritional gap. For example, even though nutritional food requirements were greater than food supplies in Morocco, food aid from donor countries more than met the nutritional gap. On the other hand, food aid met only 40 percent of the gap between nutritional requirements and food supplies in Peru.

For 1992 and 1993, food aid provided by the international community averaged 10.4 million tons per year, while nutritional needs—the food gap—averaged 25 million tons. Although the international community provided less than half the food required to satisfy the nutritional food gap, they provided over 2 million tons to eleven countries with no nutritional gap. Egypt alone received more than 50 percent of the 2 million tons. Several other countries, including Jamaica, Malawi, Morocco, El Salvador, Zimbabwe, and Cape Verde, received larger allocations than required to satisfy nutritional needs.

Bangladesh and Peru receive large amounts of food aid, but still require much larger allocations to satisfy their nutritional needs. For example, Bangladesh, the second largest recipient of aid, received only 19 percent of its nutritional needs. The three war-plagued and drought-prone countries in the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia) received large shipments of aid, but far less than their nutritional needs warranted.

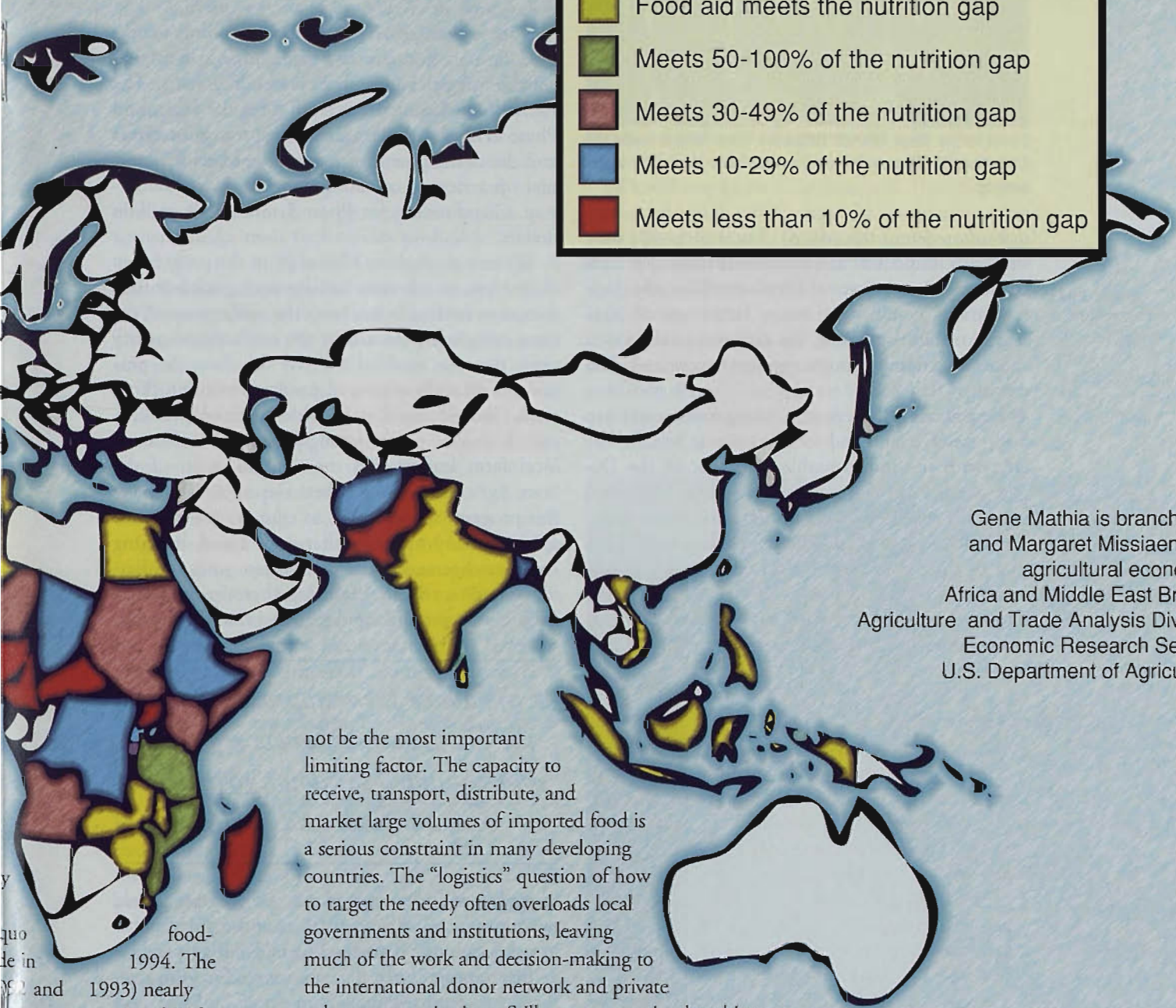
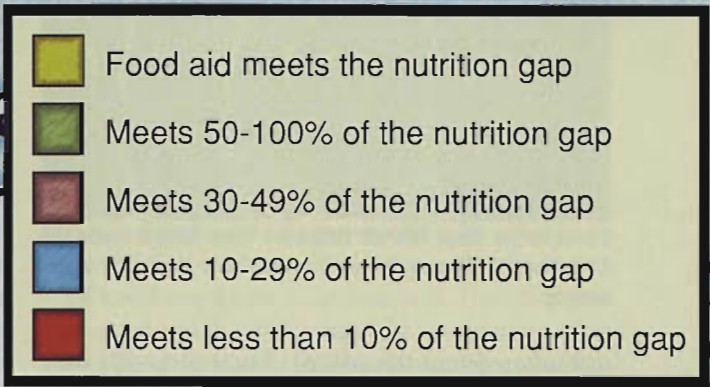
Many less populous countries also remain nutritionally vulnerable. In the Dominican Republic, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Uganda, Togo,

Burundi, and Chad, food aid provided a relatively small percentage of their nutritional shortfall.

We also calculated the amount of food aid needed to maintain the status quo level of food consumption in the same sixty developing countries for which we computed the nutritional gap. Status quo aid needs total 13.7 million tons worldwide. The current supply of food aid, (10.4 million tons in 1992 and 1993) meets the amount needed to maintain status quo food consumption in only 19 percent of the countries. The shortfall of improving diets in the developing countries needed to maintain per capita consumption amount to 14.6 million tons.

The distribution of food aid among countries is based on criteria of either maintaining the status quo or meeting nutritional status quo shortfalls in all countries could have been satisfied if food aid were allocated to these countries instead of allocating food to countries with unfilled needs. In some of the countries with unfilled needs, the generosity





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not be the most important limiting factor. The capacity to receive, transport, distribute, and market large volumes of imported food is a serious constraint in many developing countries. The "logistics" question of how to target the needy often overloads local governments and institutions, leaving much of the work and decision-making to the international donor network and private volunteer organizations. Still, some countries do achieve success. In Mozambique, for example, government and private agencies successfully redirected food-aid programs from an unwieldy bureaucratic control system to a competitive market structure since the peace agreement of 1992.

For more information

Concerning the methods, data, and country results reported here, see *Food Aids Needs Assessment*, edited by Margaret Missiaen, published by the Economic Research Service, USDA, Washington D.C., November 1993. For a copy of this report, call toll free 1-800-999-6779. Ask for Food Aid Needs Assessment (GFA-4). The cost is \$12.00 per copy.

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