



6 The EC policy and approach to Food Security and poverty reduction

This paper gives an overview of :

- Changes in approach to food security and food aid
- Three dimensions of food security
- Integrating food security within a poverty reduction framework
- The Food Aid/Food Security Regulation
- Country level programming

Changes in approach to food security and food aid

Developing countries have started to move away from narrow food self-sufficiency policies towards the broader concept of food security in which markets and public actors play a more active role in adjusting supply and demand and fuelling economic growth. In addition, appropriate Government policies, services, resource allocation and, exceptionally, relief operations, should ensure access to assets and food for the most vulnerable groups.

Currently donors are gradually shifting their aid from support to boost agricultural output and massive food aid towards supporting broad-based food security strategies along the lines of availability, access, use and crisis prevention.

Three dimensions of food security

Other than in emergency situations such as war or large scale natural disaster, food security normally involves three dimensions :

Availability of food regionally and nationally

Availability relates to the supply of food at the national level from production, stocks and imports. The functioning of markets and transport systems also affects availability. Countries with successfully developing economies, a sound external trading position and markets that function effectively, need have few concerns about overall food availability. Assistance that encourages successful overall development is therefore the best way of promoting overall and long-term food availability.

Access to food by households

Lack of access to food at the household level, whether transitory or chronic, is basically an outcome of poverty. It is therefore necessary to consider food security in the broader context of poverty reduction strategies. The majority of the poor, whether in urban or rural areas, engage in a wide range of activities (e.g. production, processing, migration, petty trade, etc.). Thus food security strategies need to optimise different approaches within a wider framework of improving livelihoods (e.g. farm and non-farm income, land, access etc.)

Food use and nutritional adequacy at individual level

Certain targeted programmes such as nutrition education, health actions, or income transfers focused on the most vulnerable, in particular women and children, may be necessary in order to address issues which affect the adequacy of food intake such as :

- intra-household distribution of food
- mother-child feeding practices
- food preparation
- food quality and safety

Integrating food security within a poverty reduction framework

Food security is one of the six priority areas for Community support to poverty reduction objectives (see Sheet 1). This means that food security problems should be addressed not only by the food security budget line, but by using all relevant development instruments. The Commission will fully integrate food security objectives and strategies into its Development Cooperation Framework both at the overall policy level and at the specific country strategy level, basing its approach on the following principles :

- the role of food aid in-kind should be limited to emergency relief and targeting of highly food-insecure people
- poverty/food security should be central to all programmes and interventions in all sectors
- there should be a differentiated approach geared to the specific poverty situations
- there should be concentration on the domestic causes of poverty and the policy response
- a multi-dimensional approach is needed with emphasis on human-oriented sustainable development.

Within this framework the Commission needs to maintain a particular focus on food security issues and a capacity to address both structural food insecurity and specific food-related problems at national and regional levels.

The Food Security/Food Aid Regulation

The Food Security Regulation¹ allows assistance to some 25 priority countries to overcome particular problems of temporary food shortages, to manage post-crisis

Situations for food recovery and to address structural food security problems. It is not intended to be the only tool for addressing food security issues. Instruments available to implement this policy include :

Support to government policies and strategies

- programme aid through the government's budget
- project support through annual or multi-annual projects
- food aid in-kind
- capacity building

Non-government aid channels

- food aid in-kind channelled through WFP and EuronAid (for NGOs)
- cash support channelled through NGOs

The case for maintaining a specific food security focus through the Food Security/Food Aid Regulation at this point of time is justified on the basis of :

- the need for a specific development instrument to support the EC's efforts to address : (i) structural food insecurity as a first step in long-term poverty reduction in some countries, (ii) critical food supply related situations at national and regional levels, and (iii) specific nutritional problems
- the need for bridging the gap between relief, rehabilitation and development
- EC commitments to international agreements and multilateral initiatives that aim to establish strategic frameworks for tackling poverty. Principal amongst these are support to the achievement of the International Development Targets and the Food Aid Convention.

Under the Food Aid Convention the EC has undertaken to continue to provide food aid. It is thus still an important component but is being progressively reduced and replaced by financial support. It should only be mobilized in the following situations :

- as a contribution, in complementarity with ECHO, in case of major crisis and disasters
- as a contribution to strategic reserves and safety nets
- linking relief, rehabilitation and development, or
- in development operations with a specific nutritional character

Relation to other EC instruments

Food security interventions need to be consistent in design and implementation

with the Commission's wider development interventions, which aim to achieve long-term poverty reduction objectives, in supporting trade policy, rural development, social policy, transport and infrastructure. In contrast, ECHO food aid programmes are a rapid response to humanitarian emergencies.

Country Level Programming

The following points must be borne in mind when undertaking country level programming for food security interventions :

- The responsibility for food aid and food security planning rests with the governments of recipient countries, with the EC providing a supportive role
- Food security objectives must be integrated within a single strategic framework – the EC Country or Regional Support Strategy
- The specific structures and resources available to pursue food security objectives must be properly integrated into coherent sector policy and strategic frameworks. For example up to three quarters of the Commission's food security activities in Africa are being carried out in the context rural development operations and thus need to be integrated into the Rural Development Profile and Strategic Framework (RDPSF).

¹Council Regulation N° 1292/96 on food-aid policy and food-aid management and special operation in support of food security - 1996

Key References

- Council Regulation N° 1292/96 on food-aid policy and food-aid management and special operation in support of food security
- Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament : « *Evaluation and future orientation of Council Regulation (EC) N° 1292/96 on food-aid policy and food-aid management and special operation in support of food security* »
- Integration of food security objectives within a poverty reduction framework – DG DEV, Feb 2000
- Agricultural sub-sector strategy paper – DG DEV, Oct 2000

Key EC documents on food security can be found at :
http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/sector/food_fr.htm
(currently not yet available in French)