

USAID

POLICY DETERMINATION

Definition of Food Security

This Policy Determination defines food security for USAID resource programming purposes, including the programming of Development Assistance (DA), Development Fund for Africa (DFA), and Economic Support Fund (ESF) resources directed to food security objectives. Although the definition is broad enough to include the P.L. 480 definition of food security (see number 3, below), the statutory definition will be used for P.L. 480 Title II and Title III programs.

At least four similar definitions of food security have been used by international organizations, Congress and USAID:

1. "Access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life." (World Bank)
2. "All people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need." (FAO Committee on World Food Security)
3. "Access by all people at all times to sufficient food and nutrition for a healthy and productive life." (The Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1990 {P.L.480})
4. "When all people at all times have access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life." (USAID Bureau for Africa, 1986)

The following statement incorporates the fundamental concepts of each of these definitions and will serve as the basic definition of food security for USAID:

When all people at all times have both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive and healthy life.

The pursuit of food security objectives in a specific country does not necessarily imply a need for food aid. In a given situation, food aid may or may not be the most appropriate intervention to achieve food security.

The discussion, below, illustrates how USAID programs can relate the food security objective to Mission and regional bureau strategies and program/project design for P.L. 480, DA, DFA and ESF programs. Clearly, P.L. 480 Title III food aid resources and USAID's dollar resources can be used to complement each other and help achieve food security in ways that are consonant with USAID's economic development objectives.

Within the context of the food security definition, three distinct variables are central to the attainment of food security: availability, access and utilization.

The following summary descriptions of these variables indicate the types of problems which may need to be addressed to improve food security in any particular country or locality. In any specific situation, the problems may be one or many, and approaches to improving food security may vary among and even within countries.

Food Availability: Sufficient quantities of appropriate, necessary types of food from domestic production, commercial imports or donors other than USAID are consistently available to the individuals or are within reasonable proximity to them or are within their reach.

Constraints to food availability include: inappropriate agricultural knowledge, technologies, and practices; inappropriate economic policies, including pricing, marketing, tax and tariff policies; lack of foreign exchange; inadequate agricultural inputs; non-existent or ineffective private sector; population growth rates that offset increased production or imports; marketing and transportation systems which inhibit the cost-effective movement of food from source to need; inability to predict, assess and cope with emergency situations which interrupt food supplies; natural resource, climatic, and (especially in Africa) disease constraints; donor disinterest or fatigue; and political choice on the part of the host government at any level.

Food Access: Individuals have adequate incomes or other resources to purchase or barter to obtain levels of appropriate foods needed to maintain consumption of an adequate diet/nutrition level.

Constraints to individual food access include: economic growth that is inadequate in the aggregate, or insufficiently broad-based, in general, leading to a lack of job opportunities or lack of incentives to become a productive participant in the economy; negative impacts of national economic policies; inadequate training and/or job skills; lack of credit or other means to exchange assets or income streams; and food losses associated with ineffective and inefficient harvesting, storage, processing and handling; political decisions favoring one group over another.

Food Utilization/Consumption: Food is properly used; proper food processing and storage techniques are employed; adequate knowledge of nutrition and child care techniques exists and is applied; and adequate health and sanitation services exist.

Constraints to food utilization include: nutrient losses associated with food preparation; inadequate knowledge and practice of health techniques, including those related to nutrition, child care, and sanitation; and cultural practices that limit consumption of a nutritionally adequate diet by certain groups or family members.

It is obvious that many potential factors may contribute to food insecurity. Analysis of the specific situation will determine the constraint(s) a Title III or other USAID program might address to improve food security in a country where such assistance is contemplated.

In general, in the poorest developing countries, food security for all is a long-term objective which will be attained mainly through sustained economic growth -- more quickly if it is equitable and broad-based. The contribution of USAID programs to food security will be greater if the host country is committed to economic and social policies that promote a broad-based pattern of growth and can be demonstrated by their effectiveness in improving one or more of the variables affecting food security.

This definition and discussion are consistent with current USAID policy papers on Food and Agricultural Development (May 1982), and Pricing, Subsidies, and Related Policies in Food and Agriculture (November 1982).