

Farm Bill and U. S. international food aid policy: Factors influencing recent reforms and their effects on global hunger, food security, and nutrition

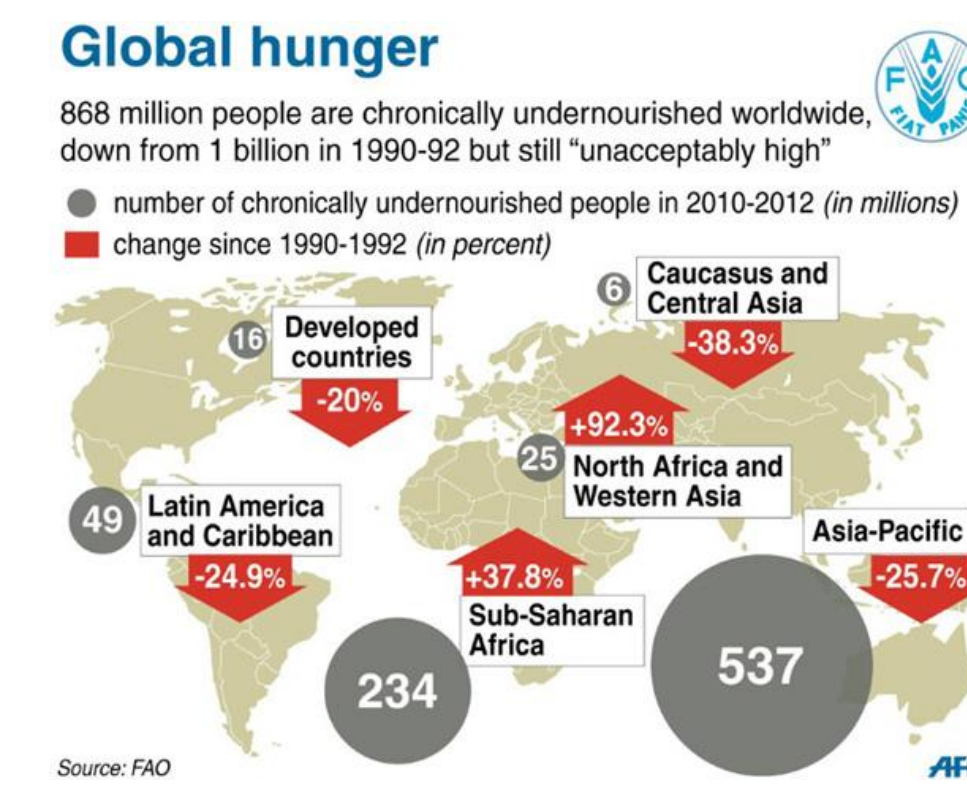
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Objectives

1. A review of the major U.S. policies related to international food aid, including food aid legislation in Title II of the Farm Bill and the Emergency Food Security Program.
2. A review of the interplay of actors, political contexts, and issue characteristics involved in U.S. international food aid policies.
3. An analysis, using Shiffman and Smith's framework, of recent U.S. international food aid policy reform efforts and their failure to be enacted into law.

Background & significance

- **Millennium Development Goal 1:** Halve the number of people who suffer from hunger
- As of 2014, 805 million people globally suffer from chronic hunger¹
- International food aid, also referred to as food assistance, aims to save lives by providing needed food in times of natural disaster, conflict, or other emergency
- **The U.S. is the world's largest donor of food aid,** donating over \$1.5 billion in food aid in 2013.
- U.S. international food aid policy is complex, involves several groups of opposing stakeholders, and has been the subject of reform efforts in recent years.
- This public health analysis reviews the mechanisms and actors at work at this intersection of U.S. domestic and international public health policy and analyzes the failure of recent reforms to be enacted, with President Obama's 2013 reform proposal highlighted as a case study.



A framework for policy analysis

A framework developed by Jeremy Shiffman and Stephanie Smith² is used to understand the interplay of actor power, context, ideas, and issue characteristics related to U.S. international food aid policy. It is useful in explaining why food aid reform gained enough momentum to be proposed through several Presidential Budget Requests from 2005 to 2013, but ultimately has never succeeded in being enacted into law.

	Description
Actor power	The strength of the individuals and organizations concerned with the issue; policy community cohesion, leadership, the presence of guiding institutions, and civil society mobilization are important factors
Ideas	The ways in which actors and stakeholders involved with the issue agree to its definition and causes (internal frame) and how the issue is portrayed to the public (external frame)
Political contexts	The environments in which actors operate; this can include the presence of policy "windows" of opportunity
Issue characteristics	Features of the problem, including the presence of credible indicators and effective interventions

Food aid: Origins of the U.S. system

- 1954: Food for Peace, primary food aid legislation, signed into law to address U.S. agricultural surpluses and provide humanitarian aid. Authorized every ~5 years within the larger omnibus U.S. "Farm Bill"
- Includes food aid programs for both emergencies (natural disasters, conflicts, etc.) through Title II and non-emergencies (development programs implemented by NGOs)
- President Eisenhower stated that Food for Peace is meant to: *"lay the basis for a permanent expansion of [US] exports of agricultural products with lasting benefits to [the United States] and the people of other lands."*

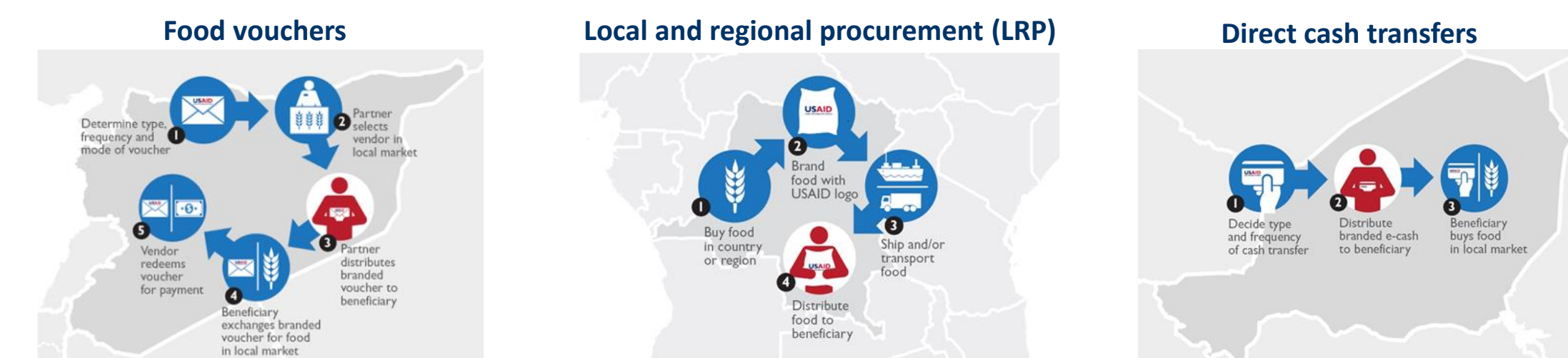
This lays the groundwork for **two different purposes** for U.S. international food aid:

- 1) To benefit American economic interests
- 2) To provide humanitarian assistance to people in other countries

Food aid: Three major controversies

In-kind commodity donations (instead of cash-based assistance)³

- Donating actual food involves a long chain of purchasing, bagging, and shipping within and from the U.S. before food reaches people in need in other countries
- Evaluations have found: wastes time and money
- This "tying" of food aid to donor country's economic interests is heavily criticized by other countries and the World Trade Organization
- Most of U.S. food aid is in-kind: \$1.47 billion and 1.3 million metric tons in 2013
- **Potential policy solution:** Cash-based assistance instead of in-kind donations. The U.S. already does this through a relatively small program (\$380 million), the Emergency Food Security Program, which implements the following programs:

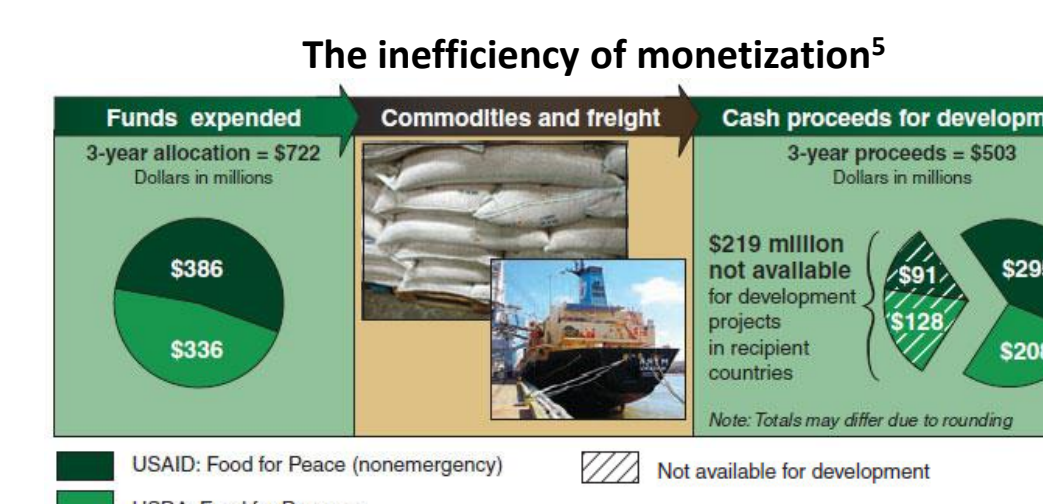
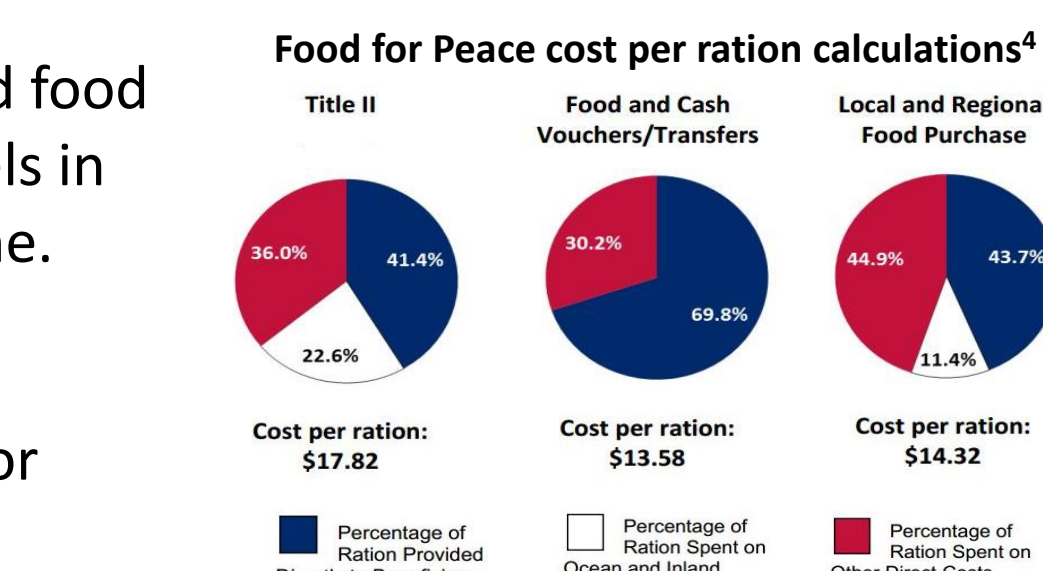


U.S. cargo preference legislation

- States that 50% of the volume of U.S. in-kind food donations must be shipped on U.S.-flag vessels in order to help maintain a U.S. merchant marine.
- Critics say: raises costs and takes longer
- In-kind donations take 160 days on average for delivery, while LRP takes 56 days

Monetization

- Selling Food for Peace commodities in the local markets of recipient countries
- NGOs use these funds to run non-emergency development programs
- Evaluations found: inefficient, wastes money, might harm local markets



Actor power in food aid reform

Reform-supporting actors

- **Internal idea frame:** the purpose of food aid is to provide humanitarian assistance to people in other countries
 - **Concerned with:** cost and time efficiency in terms of reaching as many beneficiaries as possible with limited resources; interested in policy reform to make programs more effective
- George W. Bush Administration
 - Barack Obama Administration
 - U.S. Agency for International Development
 - Conservative think tanks concerned with efficiency
 - NGOs implementing non-emergency development programs (ex: Oxfam, CARE, Bread for the World)

Reform-opposing actors

- **Internal idea frame:** the purpose of food aid is to benefit American domestic economic interests
 - **Concerned with:** maintaining or increasing funding for their industry or for their programs through food aid policy; interested in keeping the current system
- "Big Agra" (ex: Cargill, ADM, Bunge)
 - U.S. shipping industry
 - NGOs implementing non-emergency development programs and funded through monetization (ex: World Vision, ACDI/VOCA, Planet Aid)

Powerless actors?

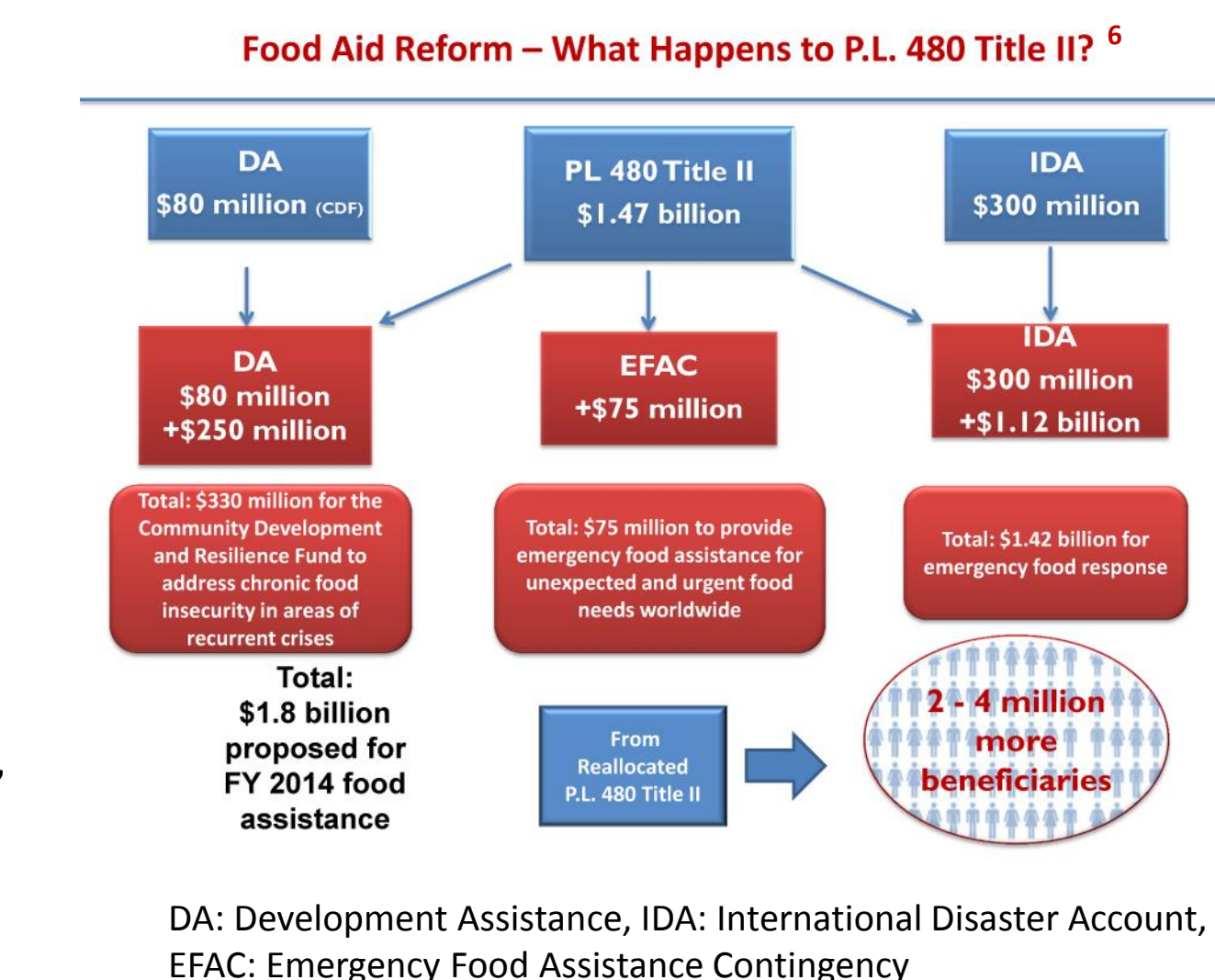
The actual final recipients of food aid – food insecure, malnourished people in other countries – have typically not had their voices heard in the U.S. policy arena though they are the ultimate beneficiaries of U.S. international food aid programs

Food aid policy reform efforts

- Food aid reform efforts from 2005 to 2013 focused on moving the U.S. food aid system away from the three controversial policies mentioned previously to a system that focuses primarily on cash-based food assistance.
- In its 2014 Presidential Budget Request (submitted to Congress in 2013), the Obama Administration proposed dramatic policy changes that would de-fund Food for Peace Title II, moving all these funds to already existing USAID

Resulting policy shifts:

- Monetization would end.
- Development programs will continue, but funded entirely through CDRF instead of monetization.
- Commodity purchasing will continue, but there will be more flexibility and time and money savings through the ability to use funds for cash transfers, vouchers, LRP, or in-kind U.S. food aid as needed



Analysis: The failure of food aid reform

Factors making food aid reform a policy agenda priority

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|-----------------------|--|
| Political contexts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International movement away from type of food aid programs implemented by the United States • U.S. farmers no longer need help utilizing a grain surplus • U.S. government looking for ways to operate food aid programs with limited funding (due to recession and sequestration) |
| Issue characteristics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-kind food donation, U.S. cargo preference, and monetization seen as inefficient uses of time and money • Global hunger and malnutrition are still major global health problems, emergencies and disasters are on the rise worldwide |

Factors preventing food aid reform from being enacted into law

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|-------------|--|
| Actor power | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlikely partnership of big industry and humanitarian-minded NGOs is powerful. The NGOs bring "legitimacy" to the industry cause. • Reform-opposed actors were not included in negotiating the suggested policy reforms and, subsequently, took a defensive, reactionary stance instead of being open to compromise • Reform-opposed actors are well-organized to lobby against reform (associations represent industry while NGOs have an organizing body); reform-supporting actors do not have one cohesive voice |
| Ideas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External frame (for opposed actors): reform will hurt U.S. jobs • External frame (for opposed actors): cash-based assistance won't provide transparency and accountability • Internal frame: food aid should benefit U.S. economic interests |

Conclusions

- U.S. international food aid policy is comprised of a complex set of mechanisms bringing together federal agencies, varied American business sectors, and development-minded NGOs, all with different perspectives toward food aid reform
- For food aid policy reform to be successful in the future:
 - All actors, especially those initially opposed to reform, need to be brought to the negotiating table to discuss new food aid policies
 - External idea frames (regarding U.S. jobs and food aid accountability) need to be favorable to the public
 - Issue characteristics (regarding the efficiency of new policies that change the three controversial mechanisms) need to be strengthened with further evaluation studies

Literature cited

¹ FAO, IFAD, WFP (2014). *The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2014. Strengthening the enabling environment for food security and nutrition*. Rome, FAO.

² Shiffman, J. and Smith, S. (2007). Generation of political priority for global health initiatives: a framework and case study of maternal mortality. *Lancet* 370: 1370-9.

³ U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) (2013). *Types of Emergency food aid*. Retrieved from: <http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/agriculture-and-food-security/food-assistance/programs/emergency-programs/types-emergency>.

⁴ USAID (2013). *Food for Peace - The Cost Savings of Food Aid Reform*. Retrieved from: <http://www.usaid.gov/foodaidreform>

⁵ Government Accountability Office (2011). *International food assistance: funding development projects through the purchase, shipment, and sale of U.S. commodities is inefficient and can cause adverse market impacts*. Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office, 2011.

⁶ USAID (2013). *Fact Sheet, Food Aid Reform: Behind the Numbers*. Retrieved from http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1869/FoodAidReform_BehindtheNumbers.pdf.