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WHOSE NEEDS ARE WE MEETING?  
A CASE FOR IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF  
U.S. FOOD AID PROGRAMS

Statement of Everett M. Ressler,  
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to the  
Presidential Commission on World Hunger  
Public Participation and Communication Subcommittee  
February 19, 1979

First, I would like to take this opportunity to express the appreciation of Fred Cuny, Alan Taylor, Jinx Parker and myself for the invitation to present our comments on the issues involved in international food aid.

INTERTECT is an international cooperative of consultants specializing in problems associated with disaster relief and reconstruction. Established in 1971 as a professional organization, the group is involved in a broad range of activities -- including pre-disaster planning, disaster mitigation, technical assistance, training, research, evaluation, and information sharing -- providing specialized support to governmental, non-governmental, and international voluntary agencies seeking to be more effective in their humanitarian work in the developing countries.

The basis for our involvement in world hunger issues is our extensive field experience in disaster situations, where food availability is always a major concern. Although disasters are non-typical situations, the issues that arise in a disaster must be understood in the context of the long-term developmental processes of a given region. Thus, emergency food aid considerations cannot and should not be divorced from pre- and post-disaster food production and distribution systems. It is from this perspective that I offer the following comments, addressing the question of food aid as it relates to world hunger problems.

#### Whose Needs Are We Meeting?

There are unquestionably many situations where the international exchange of food commodities is appropriate, constructive, and needed. But there is a growing concern that some U.S. food aid programs, as presently administered, inadvertently contribute to or cause hunger, paradoxically, within the countries where food is considered to be most needed.

The present controversy over food aid emanates from many different sectors. Economists have suggested that food aid has potential disincentive effects on local agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Field workers in many different areas of the world are beginning to speak out about such observed effects. Attached

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<sup>1</sup>T. W. Schultz, "Value of U.S. Farm Surplus to Underdeveloped Countries," Journal of Farm Economics, 42 (Dec. 1960), 1031-1042; H. W. Singer, M. R. Benedict, V. K. R. V. Rao, J. Figueres and P. N. Rosenstein-Rodan, "Report by the Expert Group to the Director-General of the FAO," Development Through Food, FAO, Rome 1961; F. M. Fischer, "A Theoretical Production in Recipient Countries," Journal of Farm Economy, 45 (Nov. 1963), 868-875; P. J. Isenman and H. W. Singer, Food Aid: Disincentive Effects and Their Policy Implications, Institute of Development Studies (Communication Number 116), Brighton, Sussex, Dec. 1975.

to these comments, as Appendix A, is an example of a field report from Haiti which concludes that the Food-For-Work program investigated has "hurt the initiative of local farmers to grow their own food and has encouraged already present feelings of dependency, inferiority, and low self-worth."<sup>2</sup>

Interviews conducted in villages receiving food aid indicate that many small farmers strongly believe the large-scale importation of foods adversely affects market prices. Regarding the importation of food into post-earthquake Guatemala, one farmer stated:

The price of corn before the food from outside arrived was \$7.50 per quintal. After it came, I had to sell my corn at \$4.60 to \$4.80 the quintal. I lost about \$2.90 per quintal. So<sup>3</sup> on the 40 quintals I sold, I lost quite a lot.

In some food aid programs, even the nutritional benefit to recipients is being challenged.<sup>4</sup>

These are serious allegations which potentially affect both policy and program. Although diverse, each relates to the issue of the impact of U.S. food aid on the lives of people in developing countries.

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<sup>2</sup>"Report on the Food-For-Work Project, Piton Mountain, Mombin Crochu, Haiti," David Cockley, Mennonite Central Committee, Mombin Crochu, Haiti, 1978.

<sup>3</sup>"The Appropriateness of PL480 Food Donations After the 1976 Earthquake and in Non-Disaster Times," Edited interview with Francisco Batzibal Pablo and Benito Sicajan Sipac, by Robert Gersony and Tony Jackson, Chimaltenango, Guatemala, October 1977.

<sup>4</sup>"Food and Nutrition in Self-Reliant National Development: The Impact on Child Nutrition of Jamaican Government Policy," Thomas J. Marchione (Reprint from Medical Anthropology, Issue I, Winter 1977).

In our research, and from interviews conducted with food aid administrators, we have found that in the twenty-five years which have elapsed since the passing of the U.S. Public Law 480, virtually no studies have been carried out which analyze the actual impact of the provision of food aid on local developmental processes. There have been studies identifying ways in which food aid programs help the U.S. farmer, and numerous reports on the managerial and logistical aspects of various programs; but almost no emphasis has been placed on understanding the broader impact of these programs on recipient communities.<sup>5</sup>

How can we justify the provision of food aid without assessment of what effects our actions will have on the lives of the people we intend to help?

Our food aid programs are based on certain basic assumptions about need, food availability, and results. The evidence that does exist suggests that we must closely examine our assumptions to answer the following:

1. Is food aid necessary?
2. What is the social and economic impact of large-scale food programs on a country's development?
3. Is the food provided appropriate?
4. If the food is necessary, how should it be provided?
5. Does the provision of food aid after a disaster speed or delay recovery?
6. Whose needs does a food program meet?

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<sup>5</sup>Appendix B identifies some of the wide range of questions that must be dealt with in any attempt to understand the actual impact of a food aid program.

The central question being addressed by the Commission is, "What can the United States do about world hunger?" I would like to suggest the following as a beginning point.

#### Recommendations

In the interest of making our food aid programs more responsive to world hunger needs, new guidelines should be established. But any such action must be predicated upon in-depth research to examine the effects of our programs on the beneficiary communities. I, therefore, recommend to the Presidential Commission on World Hunger:

1. That research and evaluation of the impact of food aid programs on recipient communities be encouraged as a priority concern;
2. That consideration be given to require a periodic assessment of impact for every food aid program;
3. That the use and impact of Title II foods be closely examined;  
and
4. That the Congressionally-mandated law requiring that an annual minimum level of 1.6 million metric tons of food commodities be distributed through Title II be changed from a fixed minimum to an amount contingent upon substantiated need.

The lack of a better understanding of impact is a serious indictment of our commitment to alleviating world hunger and is without question the most important issue threatening the effectiveness of food aid programs today. Our attempt to make a constructive and positive contribution to

the resolution of world hunger problems must be built on more than good intentions.

Appendix A

REPORT ON THE FOOD-FOR-WORK PROJECT,  
PITON MOUNTAIN, MOMBIN CROCHU, HAITI

REPORT ON THE FOOD-FOR-WORK PROJECT,  
PITON MOUNTAIN, MOMBIN CROCHU, HAITI  
(David Cockley, Mennonite Central Committee, Mombin Crochu, Haiti)

From February until December of 1978, Foundation C.A.R.E. sponsored a soil conservation project using Food-for-Work (FFW) on the Piton Mountain located near Mombin Crochu, Haiti. C.A.R.E.'s intention on the project was to aid in the development of the Mombin Crochu inhabitants through the introduction of soil conservation techniques. It was the understanding of C.A.R.E. representatives that the project was given through and for the Mombin Crochu Community Council, which was in turn to pay for the transportation costs of the food to Mombin Crochu. C.A.R.E. representatives believed that the project was a benefit to the area by giving work and food to the poorer peasants (especially landless) and by introducing good soil conservation techniques.

The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) which has had volunteers in Mombin Crochu since November 1977, conducted a baseline survey of the agricultural, economic and health problems in 19 communities (1037 families) in and surrounding the town of Mombin Crochu during September and October of 1978. This survey gave MCC the opportunity to check the effects of the FFW project on the inhabitants of the area and to investigate some of the alleged corruptions at the local level.

The Mombin Crochu area is a ruggedly mountainous region, located just off the northeastern edge of the Central Plateau, which generally receives moderate amounts of rain during its seven month wet season. In the past two years, there have been sufficient rains to give good harvests of beans, sorghum and root crops although a lack of rain in July of both years severely limited the corn harvests. Nonetheless, there has been food available in Mombin Crochu, even at the end of the five month dry season.

The Piton Mountain (Morne Piton Des Roches) is a 1136 meter high peak which is the highest point in the area. This peak, like most other mountains in Haiti, is parcelled up into family plots and is cultivated right to the top. The mountain is far too steep to be safely cultivated and should ideally be left in trees or grass.

Under the contract with the Mombin Crochu Community Council, sixty laborers were to work on the project three days a week for ten months. Through the survey, MCC found 129 households that reported members who worked on Piton. Of these, 14 came from the town of Mombin Crochu, and 115 came from 15 different rural communities (Table 1). A large proportion of workers came from 5 rural communities (Chervin 1, Haut Grand Bois, Lospinite, Carata/Piton and Bas Rosi). These 129 households represent 12.4% of the total surveyed population. Three distant communities were too far away to be affected by the project.



The survey helps show that although the Community Council receives the food and acknowledgement for the FFW project, it is not the Council members that work on the project. But since the Council is responsible for paying for the transportation of the food, each worker is required to pay 3 gourds (\$.60) every two weeks to the Council treasury. This \$72.00 per month comes mainly from rural peasants and not from town members. Only four of the fourteen workers who live in the town, are actually members of the Community Council. Despite this, any surplus funds collected were not returned to the workers, but used to benefit the Community Council (4 of 129 workers, or 3.1% of the laborers).

The survey results also show that the workers on the project are not the poorer peasants in the area nor the landless (Table 2). Although some households reported only 0.25 carreaux (0.8 acre) of land, we did not find any landless peasants who worked on Piton. The average number of gardens farmed per household (3.2) was identical for both the Piton subsample and the total surveyed population. The Piton laborers averaged 2.04 carreaux (6.5 acres) of land which is only slightly lower than the 2.16 carreaux average for the total surveyed population. The Piton subsample also averaged 6.5 animals per household (3.8 chickens and 2.7 larger animals).

Foundation C.A.R.E.'s belief that the laborers are mainly landless peasants are not supported by our findings. No effort was made by C.A.R.E. or the Community Council to allow the poor or landless to work on the project. The choice of who would work on the project was decided by the Council president or the six foremen who supervised the work.

Since the contract was originally made between C.A.R.E. and the Mombin Crochu Community Council, the requirements for working on the project have been altered by the community leaders. Originally, those working on the project paid 03.00 (\$.60) every two weeks and worked three days a week on the project. Beginning in the summer months, the workers began to be required to work a fourth day on a community road-building project. Failure to work the extra day forfeited the worker's "privilege" of working on the mountain and thus obtaining the food. During the harvesting months of September through November, the workers were obligated to labor an additional day in the garden of one of the community leaders. By the final months of the project, each laborer was paying \$.60 every two weeks and required to work five days a week while receiving the same amount of oil and flour that they received for working three days a week.

It seems obvious that if the laborers are required to work for five days of the week, they have little time left to work in their own gardens. This appears to be the case from interviews made with project workers who claim they did not plant much or any of their gardens during the year. Instead they were relying on the food received from C.A.R.E. or more honestly, on the money obtained when that food was sold. This dependency on C.A.R.E. food diminishes the peasant's initiative to support himself. It also accentuates the feelings of inferiority and low self worth already present in the Haitian farmer.

The one and a half quarts of oil, four marmits of bulgar and one marmit of soya flour given each worker every two weeks have a local market value of about 24 gourds (\$4.80). Every project worker we interviewed said he sold most or all of the food received. Very little was actually consumed by the workers' families. Of this \$4.80, \$.60 returns to the Community Council treasury as payment for the transportation of the food, leaving \$4.20 as reimbursement for ten days of labor (\$.42 per day).

Over sixty-five percent of the Piton workers spend a substantial part of their time as day-laborers for other farmers (Table 3). This is a very high percentage of the area's day-laborers, especially in some communities. The larger community was hit by a shortage of available laborers during this past year because such a high percentage were involved with the Piton project. If the workers on Piton had worked, as usual, for other farmers, the farmers would have benefited and the workers themselves would have made \$.80 to \$1.00 per day. Most of the workers on the project were not aware of the economic disadvantage of working on Piton. When interviewed, they did not realize how much they were losing.

There had not been much education of soil conservation techniques during this project either. Of the 129 households interviewed that reported workers on the Piton project, only 18 (13.9%) acknowledged that they knew how to use an A-frame level. The A-frame level is the basic tool used to mark out contour lines in any soil conservation work and was used as the basic tool on Piton. Only the foremen, however, actually handled the A-frames. Substantially fewer than 18 of the workers had actually used an A-frame level in their own gardens. As a percentage, this is almost triple the percentage of farmers in our total sample population who know how to use an A-frame (4.7%) but still does not speak favorably of the educational effort of a ten month long project (Table 3).

The laborers viewed the Piton project as a means of obtaining food, not as a way of learning better techniques. There was no measurable educational effort made on soil conservation and the effects on the workers' methods, if any, were minimal. It was frequently heard from interviewed workers that to do soil conservation in their own gardens required a large FFW project. There was no understanding that the techniques done on the large project could be used in each worker's garden.

Technically, the Piton project was not done correctly and may cause severe erosion problems in the future. The problem was caused partially by a lack of supervision by trained personnel and partially by the extreme steepness of the mountain. During the initial months of the project the work was supervised by an agricultural technician from the Haitian Department of Agriculture. His departure marks the time when the quality of the work declined. The contour ramps made after his departure were uneven and actually increased the danger of erosion damage. Grass was not immediately planted in the ramps and this caused some of the ramps to crumble when the spring rains arrived. Because of improper motivation, there is little hope that the ramps will be repaired or maintained now that the food is finished.

It is the opinion of MCC volunteers working in the area that the soil conservation project on the Piton Mountain has been a detriment to the development of the area. Foundation C.A.R.E.'s use of FFW has hurt the initiative of local farmers to grow their own food and has encouraged already present feelings of dependence, inferiority and low self worth. The project was also used by local community leaders to oppress the rural peasants. The food used in the project never reached the neediest members of the community nor the landless as C.A.R.E. intended. Also, there was little or no education nor motivation given during the project so that workers could improve their own land or continue using improved techniques after the project was concluded.

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TABLE 1.

Households with Members Who Worked on the Piton Project from 19 Surveyed Communities

<u>Communities</u>	<u>Km from Mombin</u>	<u># Houses Surveyed</u>	<u># Reporting Piton Workers</u>	<u>% Houses w/ Piton Workers</u>
Mombin Crochu	----	109	14	12.8
Chervin 1	0.5	54	20	37.1
Bas Grande Bois	0.5	15	3	20.0
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Kompoz	1.0	18	3	16.7
Haut Grande Bois	1.0	37	14	37.8
Lospinite	1.0	53	13	24.5
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Godat	2.0	84	7	8.6
Chervin 2	2.0	37	3	8.1
Gaspar	2.2	54	2	3.7
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Carata/Piton	2.5	59	26	44.1
Haut Goabarie	2.5	43	2	4.6
Blockaus	3.5	52	3	5.8
<hr/>				
Bas Rosi	3.5	40	12	30.0
Jumeaux	3.5	49	4	8.2
Bas Goabarie	3.7	43	2	4.6
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Terre Salée	5.0	97	1	1.0
LaCorrosse	7.0	75	0	0.0
Pont Sable	7.0	65	0	0.0
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Balisage	9.0	53	0	0.0
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		1037	129	12.4

TABLE II.

Land and Animal Ownership by Workers on Piton

	<u>Number Houses</u>	<u>Ave. # Gardens Worked</u>	<u>Ave. # Carreaux Worked</u>	<u>Ave. Number Chickens</u>	<u>Ave. # Large Animals</u>	<u>Ave. # Total Animals</u>
Total Surveyed Population	1037	3.2	2.16	3.8	3.0	6.8
Piton Workers	129	3.2	2.04	3.8	2.7	6.5

TABLE III.

Percentage of Piton Workers who Work as Day-laborers and Can Use an A-frame Level

	<u>Number Houses</u>	<u>% That Work as Day-laborers</u>	<u>% That Know How to Use A-frame Level</u>
Total Surveyed Population	1037	48.0	4.7
Piton Workers	129	66.7	13.9

David Cockley  
Mennonite Central Committee  
Mombin Crochu, Haiti

Appendix B

QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED IN  
EVALUATING PL 480 FOOD PROGRAMS

QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED IN  
EVALUATING PL 480 FOOD PROGRAMS

Alan J. Taylor  
INTERTECT

1. What happens to the food distributed? How is it used? If consumed, who eats it? What economic and/or social factors impinging on the recipient families influence the end-use of the food? Do the categories of actual consumers correspond with the categories of intended beneficiaries as defined by the program in question?
2. What role does the distributed food play in the domestic economy of the recipient families? How important is this resource in comparison with:
  - a. total family income;
  - b. total nutritional intake of
    - the family as a whole, and
    - its more vulnerable members (under-fives and pregnant and lactating mothers)?
3. Do the recipients know how to prepare and use the food provided? Is there any correlation between the socio-economic status of the recipient families and their understanding of how the food might be prepared and used?
4. How do the beneficiaries view the food and the program under which it is provided? How do non-recipients in the same or adjacent communities view the same program? What importance is attributed to the food? Does the receipt of food bestow or reinforce any particular connotations of social or economic class or status? Does it excite envy, jealousy, resentment or conflict of an inter-personal or inter-group nature?
5. In those areas where Title II commodities are used to promote nutrition education activities, what is the relationship between the prevailing causes of malnutrition and the education provided. Does the education offer efficacious and realistic means for improvement of nutritional standards, given the constraints which prevail in the community(ies) in question?
6. In the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) program, what is the relationship between the food distributed and the educational objectives of the program? Under what circumstances does the availability of the

food facilitate or hinder the achievement of educational objectives? In nutrition education programs which are conducted in similar communities but without the presence of Title II foodstuffs, what results are achieved, and how do these compare with those obtained in food-aided programs?

7. What is the relationship between the community development goals stated in MCH and Food for Work (FFW) programs, and the organizational and logistical procedures by which the programs are implemented? Does the spatial and/or temporal distribution of feeding centers or projects assist, or interfere with, the achievement of community development objectives? Do program norms which enact the principle of accountability interfere with desired community development processes?
8. What influence does the presence of Title II commodities in a community have on the distribution of political power within the community? Does the availability of food -- as a resource injected from outside -- affect the functioning of democratic processes at the community level?
9. What effect does the introduction of Title II food, or the continuance of such food supplies, have on the values, attitudes and behavior of the recipients, especially with respect to the development of their own potential for self-help? Does the distribution of Title II food aid (for MCH or FFW programs) create the expectation among recipients that it is outside agents which are primarily responsible for initiating development?
10. Are the quantities of Title II food which are made available and the timing of the arrival of this food in recipient communities congruent with the objectives of the program(s) under which it is used?
11. Is there any evidence to indicate that Title II distributions act as a disincentive to local agricultural production?
12. In FFW programs, what is the role of the food provided, as defined by the recipients themselves? Does this differ from the official intentions of the programs? How important is the food in mobilizing labor for community work projects? Does the introduction of Title II food into community work projects alter expectations such that voluntary

- participation in traditional community work activities is suppressed?
13. In those programs where small monetary "contributions" are solicited from the beneficiaries by the distributing agency (nominally to cover the cost of transporting the food from warehouse to community), do the poorest of the poor benefit less readily than the slightly better off?
  14. How well do the priorities and objectives of field workers correspond with the stated objectives of the food aid programs? If differences are encountered, to what are these to be attributed?
  15. What effect, if any, would the substitution of a cash payment to participants in FFW projects have on the availability of labor for such projects; on the quantity and/or quality of work performed; on the nutritional status of the recipients and their families; and on the social and political processes associated with FFW programs?
  16. What role is played by the intermediary between the U.S. private voluntary agencies -- which are responsible for the conduct of the Title II program -- and the ultimate recipients? To what extent is the U.S. food resource used by or for the strengthening of indigenous institutions in the recipient country? Do church groups, religious missions, indigenous governmental or parastatal institutions benefit from the food resource in any way which may be actually, or potentially, counter-productive to the course of development?
  17. Do beneficiaries, and other nationals of the recipient country, know where the food comes from? What importance, if any, do they attach to this? Are the attitudes of the recipients towards the U.S. or towards any intermediary institution (the Catholic Church or CARE, for instance) significantly influenced by the content and/or style of the food aid programs?
  18. Are local attitudes towards, and patterns of, foreign versus locally-produced foodstuffs altered in any way by the availability of Title II commodities or by related nutrition education activities? If such changes are detectable, what are the budgeting implications for the recipient families?