

From the Heart of America: PVOs Celebrate 50 Years of PL-480
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Over the past 50 years, American Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs) have delivered more than 60 million tons of food to people in need around the world. Roughly translated, we have touched almost 750 million lives through food aid. This is food that was produced by American farmers, stored in American grain elevators, purchased by our government, processed and packed by our corporate partners and shipped through American ports by American carriers. This unique partnership has been a tremendous force for good in the world, and I think we—and the American people who have supported this work—can take a great amount of well-deserved pride in the program.

As important as the history we celebrate is the pre-history of PL-480. For it is here that we find the beginnings of American food aid, rooted in the simple generosity and concern of Americans for people in need. It is also here that we find the invaluable and early role played by PVOs in those formative years before the Marshall Plan. We were, as they say, “present at the creation.”

In 1943, Lutheran World Relief, Church World Service, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the American Friends Service Committee and War Relief Services (the early name for Catholic Relief Services) were all deeply engaged in providing what private food assistance they could to war-torn populations in Europe and Asia. These agencies were part of a loose grouping called the American Council of Voluntary Agencies in Foreign Services (ACVAFS).

The leadership of ACVAFS realized—as they struggled to organize food donations from groups in churches, meeting halls and synagogues around the country—that thousands of Americans wanted an alternative to donating to religiously based groups. Together they formulated what became the Cooperative for American Relief Everywhere (CARE), and the long famous brand, the CARE package, emerged. Chase Manhattan Bank offered a \$3 million line of credit, and this pairing of civil society and business began what was another major reflection of American goodwill.

The World War II years in America saw a tremendous outpouring of generosity and a commitment to collaboration on behalf of those in need. It was this spirit that later helped move the Truman Administration and Congress to appropriate the equivalent of \$100 billion today for what we know as the Marshall Plan. But as the Marshall Plan helped put Europe back on its feet, it became clear that hungry people worldwide could never know peace, would never truly know freedom.

From these roots sprang the greatest long-term program to help people help themselves: Public Law 480 of 1954, the Food for Peace Program.

Over the years this program has changed to meet the needs of the poor. It has moved from a means of agricultural surplus disposal to one that purchases commodities through appropriations to meet relief and development needs.

At first we provided food to the destitute, the victims of war and natural disasters. As the years passed, the food became a vehicle for self-help—road building, school feeding and programs designed to improve the health of women and children. Today, a growing focus is the use of food aid to help people avoid disaster and hunger through self-help and preparedness programs. We meet the needs of the poor today while helping them prepare to meet their own needs with their own resources tomorrow.

Helping People Help Themselves

When I began managing PL-480 programs in the early 1970s in Sierra Leone, we used food aid in three principle ways: mother-child health, school feeding and food-for-work.

▶ Mother-child health

In these programs food aid complemented basic health care for pregnant and lactating women and for infants and young children. We mixed private support for the vitamins, medicines and nutrition education in private and public health facilities with the valued nonfat dried milk, vegetable oil and corn-soy blend. Food aid was an attraction to the program, a nutritional and economic supplement. Millions of children survived the scourge of diarrheal disease and malnutrition through these programs.

▶ Education

Food-assisted education has helped encourage farm families to send their children—particularly their daughters—to school. But we all learned early that food alone doesn't educate children. The involvement of local communities, made possible by food aid, has become a rallying tool for Parent-Teacher Associations, helping parents become involved in their schools and their children's education. Many of these parents did not attend school themselves. But they are being empowered to become involved—and to hold schools and teachers accountable not only for donated commodities, but for the quality of education.

Traveling in Asia, Africa or Latin America, I continually meet business, governmental and other successful leaders, whose schools and communities received Food for Peace through Save the Children, CARE, World Vision, Africare or CRS programs. They are living testaments to the best of what the program can offer.

▶ Infrastructure

The third principle way we traditionally used PL-480 was through food-for-work programs. These projects have built hundreds of thousands of miles of roads, countless schools, latrines and wells, and helped reforest and reseed untold acres.

The story of Kim Hyung Seo, who was born in 1909 on the 38th parallel, offers a compelling example of the positive potential of Food for Peace. Mr. Seo was a teacher

until he was conscripted into the Japanese army in 1943. After the war he was repatriated to Korea, where he watched his countrymen— particularly the refugees from the North— waiting in line to receive food supplies from the American PVOs.

He took it upon himself to organize the people into work groups to build small houses and reclaim small plots of marshland where cabbages, potatoes and grain could be planted. At the war's end, 24 million people were cramped into the area that is now South Korea. Most were farmers who were left without adequate land. With time and with the help of CARE, Church World Service and CRS, he reclaimed thousands of hectares of land in Seoul and gave people the means to sustain their own livelihood and dignity. That land today can be seen not as farmland but as part of the bustling metropolis that is Seoul, South Korea.

Mr. Seo is just one of thousands of examples around the world where PVO partners led efforts aimed at improvement and change using the resource provided by PL-480. Programs for maternal and child health, food-for-work and school feeding were there decades ago, and they still have a role today. However, alongside these traditional programs, American PVOs have also developed new and creative ways to use PL-480.

Many of us use it as a resource in our programs for building and strengthening democracy. A CRS program in India offers a wonderful example of this. Our food-for-work programs in India involve rural women organizing around community needs in areas such as health, education, agriculture and disaster mitigation. We have helped women not only feel empowered but to act on this newfound self-confidence.

Last year more than 1,800 of the women who participated in the food-for-work programs were elected to political office in their village councils. They are now serving as a voice for their communities at the local government level.

This type of achievement speaks to the best of our country's ideals as an exporter of democracy and offers a concrete example of what is possible when people are trusted to take a hand in their own development.

Looking Ahead

As we look ahead, the program examples I've noted are the kinds we want to continue to support. Long-term, sustainable development is fundamental to what we want, but we realize that for many millions that end will not come right away. PL-480 is a resource that can fuel efforts toward sustainable development while addressing some of the urgent needs many face today. Together, I hope that we will be able to continue to manifest this unique capacity for good. No other people in the world are so generous. No other people have the rich variety of citizen's groups directly involved in managing public resources. But I fear that this tradition may be in jeopardy.

In these post-9/11 days, we believe more than ever that the face of America's people must be visible in all aspects of how our nation is viewed abroad. Our government is generous, but all too often its generosity is neither understood nor appreciated.

We must develop a new compact among all of us who participate in this wonderful program. I would like to see the face of the farmer/producers, of USDA staff, the elevator operators, the large and small grain companies, the freight forwarder, the ports and the PVOs participating publicly together in the countries where PL-480 is being used. Let's show the face of a generous America—an America concerned about poverty, HIV/AIDS, human development and education—to those we work with and those who watch us.

I think it's important that people around the world, particularly in areas where there is tension and criticism of the actions of our government, see in us the face of Americans, whose concern for people in need is not measured by boundaries or borders.

Because PVOs are representative of American constituents, we express the concern of ordinary Americans for people they'll most likely never meet in places they'll probably never visit. Government assistance makes this aid available, and our work makes its distribution possible. The visible collaboration among PVOs, the U.S. government and all the groups in between—farmers, millers, packagers, and shippers—is what truly represents the heart of America.

As we celebrate 50 years of achievement, we stand hopeful that the next 50 years will find us meeting to discuss the countries that no longer need assistance. Certainly those countries in Europe and Asia that now contribute to the United Nations World Food Programme can be seen as examples of the power of American food aid.

The challenges ahead are great. HIV/AIDS has changed the landscape for development in ways no one could have imagined even 10 years ago. We need to create new ways of working in familiar places, places where child-headed households are becoming more common as generations of adults disappear to the disease.

Likewise, increased insecurity has created problems that require more than quick logistical fixes. Far from a pretext for retreat, this is a call for deeper engagement. Food for Peace is more important than ever in our post-September 11th world.

Let us then find a way to go forward that clearly manifests who we are and how we work together. Let us exhibit this new compact to the millions in the world's troubled areas, offering our collaboration and commitment as a sign to those in need that we will do our utmost to help them break the cycle of hunger, poverty and disease.

Together, for 50 years, we have made a world of difference. How many lives will we touch tomorrow?

Together it can be tens of millions.

