

U.S. Assistance for a Hungry World: Looking Forward

**Address by Ken Hackett
to the USDA and USAID International Food Aid Conference IX
Kansas City, Missouri
April 18, 2007**

Those of you with some interest in baseball may remember baseball cards which had the player's vital statistics on the back: hits, home runs, and RBIs. It was clear and convincing picture of the player's value and skill.

Now imagine a card, if you will, of the world. Use your mind's eye to see this set of statistics:

- An estimated 3 billion people around the world are malnourished.
- The population of the world has doubled in the last 45 years.
- Per capita production of grains around the world has fallen for 20 years.
- Each year an estimated 25 million acres are abandoned due to soil erosion.

I could go on and on. The statistics are staggering, alarming and daunting. And that's why we are here.

We are the people who grow, who process, who ship and distribute American food assistance. We are the people working to relieve hunger and food insecurity around the globe. Our work is often difficult. Our work is always vital. Sometimes it is thankless. It has become increasingly dangerous. Violence against humanitarian aid workers is at its highest level in a decade. Last year, 83 humanitarian workers were killed. 78 were wounded and 52 kidnapped.

Sharing the bounty of America's farms is a life saving tradition almost as old as the Republic. In 1812, President James Madison sent emergency aid to earthquake victims in Venezuela. Three years ago, we marked the 50th anniversary of this partnership that is PL-480, Food for Peace. We celebrated the hundreds of millions of lives that have

been touched by the program. Many of you have seen the fruits of U.S. food assistance: healthier, better-educated children, increasingly resilient families and more robust communities.

Still, the challenge of feeding hungry people remains. Hunger is a ruthless tyrant. It dictates that millions of people around the world are slaves to the simple chore of finding food every day. For those who are starving there is little time to ponder the advantages of liberty. They are never free from the pain of hunger.

Too many people live on the edge of subsistence. Any shock to them could push them over the brink. Too many people in the world still have to decide which meal to give up. Too many families in the world have to decide which member will not eat today.

Just 700 miles off the coast of Florida, in Haiti, the average person has a dietary deficit of 460 calories a day. That basically means that the average person is missing lunch every day. It is reported that as much as 80 percent of Haiti's population skips meals or even an entire day's worth of food to help make ends meet.

In the face of these great challenges, we the Private Voluntary Organizations remain committed to our mission, which is helping people be more food secure. We remain committed to feeding the hungry. We remain committed to overcoming malnourishment. With professional expertise, decades of experience and great compassion we hold firm to our goal of ending extreme hunger in the world.

Let there be no doubt that our fight against hunger is a long-term venture. We are in a marathon, not a sprint. We must show resolve and fortitude. We can't be distracted by newspaper headlines that demand quick fixes or question our motives.

The people we serve place their trust in us. They trust us and they need us to be with them for years, for decades, for generations – not for short-term spending cycles.

In my nearly four decades of humanitarian work, I have heard this message over and over again. The message is loud and clear: staying the course matters. Last year, during a visit to South Sudan, Vice President Salva Kir told me how important it was to his people that Catholic Relief Services stayed with them during the war years. He said that many came and went providing arms and money. But few stayed providing basic sustenance for their families, providing hope for the future.

Our fight against hunger must also be multi-faceted. We must employ a mix of resources. To go back to our baseball introduction, we've got to be more than a one-pitch hurler. We need to help vulnerable families diversify their assets. We need to improve their health. We need to educate their children. We need to help communities build up a safety net. With a firm and deep safety net in place, the next time disaster strikes, poor families won't have to sell off their productive assets to make it through another day.

Together our agencies are helping people build up their assets in many ways. I was recently in Madagascar, where I had the privilege of meeting a group of farmers from a village called Ampamelomana. They are working with CRS on a marketing project. This initiative is actually funded in part by USDA. It builds the capacity of farmers' associations to identify markets and grow produce that's in high demand.

With great pride, this association showed us a 9-mile-long canal they had constructed to irrigate their fields. This new canal will enable them to more than double their acreage. This, in turn, will help them fulfill a newly won market contract to grow barley.

This project gives them the technical assistance they need to increase both the quality and quantity of their crops. It also gives them better access to markets. And this project makes small loans available to farmers so they can take advantage of financial and development services that could increase their assets even further.

Even with assistance like this, small-scale farmers constantly live under the threat of a crippling setback. These vulnerable people are just one, poor rainy season or devastating crop disease from ruin. In East and Central Africa, deadly plant diseases are threatening two primary food staples, bananas and cassava.

Banana Wilt Disease causes early ripening and rotting of fruit. Eventually it wilts and kills the plant. An unusually severe strain of Cassava Mosaic Disease has expanded into a pandemic with devastating effects. Together, these two crop diseases are affecting more than 70 million people. They pose the largest, natural threat to food security that this Great Lakes region of Africa has seen in decades.

CRS is addressing this crisis through the USAID-funded Crop Crisis Control Project. To distinguish our CCCP program from the former Soviet Union, we simply call ours C3P. Under this pith acronym we are working with national and regional research institutes in Africa to educate farmers about how to manage these two diseases. We are also distributing disease-resistant strains of cassava that help alleviate the costly impact of Cassava Mosaic Disease. The result is that farmers are able to build back up their crops.

These are just two examples of a comprehensive approach to food security from Catholic Relief Services. My colleagues at other private voluntary organizations represented here could provide many other shining examples of their own.

Even with our collective labors bearing such fruit, there still remains a need to address chronic hunger. American food assistance programs must continue to play a key role in helping the world's most food insecure people. The millions of people who are too old, too young, too sick or too disabled must also receive our help. And they must receive it for as long as they need it. This is a lifetime guarantee if necessary.

Our moral obligation to respect human dignity on a global scale demands nothing less.

My agency works closely with the Missionaries of Charity in several countries. We have been partners with these inspiring women since the order was founded by Mother Teresa. The people served by the sisters in places like Ethiopia and India are the dying and the destitute. They are orphaned children who have no other recourse.

We have a moral responsibility to reach out to these innocent and desperate people. These vulnerable people are completely dependent on outside resources to meet their most basic needs. They are at the mercy of our safety net programming. PL480 has been and continues to be the foundation of that safety net.

U.S. food assistance has also played a vital role in alleviating the suffering caused by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. After years of being able to do little more than care for people as they died, we are now seeing signs of real hope. Treatment has improved dramatically for people living with HIV and AIDS. The use of antiretroviral drugs continues to grow and to work miracles quite literally.

But for these therapies to be effective, the people taking these medications need additional food. Targeted food distributions provide additional nutrition that increase the body's ability to fight off opportunistic infections. Food also increases the benefits of antiretroviral therapy and may even significantly lengthen the time between HIV infection and the onset of the illness.

U.S. food assistance also plays a role in building up individual and community assets today so that we can lessen or prevent the calamities of tomorrow. We have said this so many times before it has become our mantra. "If we don't pay now, we'll pay more later." This is just common sense and it bears repeating. "If we don't pay now, we'll pay more later."

There's an oft-quoted statistic in our industry: investing \$1 in prevention will save \$7 in emergency response. We saw this very clearly in Niger during the food crisis of 2005. Communities already served by our developmental food programs withstood the

devastation of droughts and locusts better without additional food aid because they already had diversified their assets.

We can be rightly proud of all the accomplishments and the ongoing good being carried out by U.S. food assistance programs. But that brings me to the elephant in the room.

What is the best way to feed hungry people – and do it **efficiently**?

There has been a lot of discussion around these issues. It is a virtual lightning rod for debate. There are honest points of divergence right here in this arena. We have gathered to determine the best way to fulfill our respective missions.

I believe if more cash were available through Title II, we would have greater flexibility in carrying out our programs to fight chronic world hunger. More cash through Title II would also help us address emergencies more efficiently.

With more cash, there would be less need to monetize food aid. We see monetization as inefficient and often risky. What we need is a food aid budget that is sufficiently robust to cover the needs of emergency programs. The budget must also be powerful enough to combat the causes of chronic hunger with whatever combination of cash and imported commodities is appropriate. This would give us greater flexibility. This solution allows us to decide when and where we want to engage in local or regional purchase.

Our bottom line is that we should have no less than \$2 billion in resources available from the United States to help meet the needs of the hungry. And we should have it upfront. Piecemeal appropriations for food through supplementals disrupt well-planned programs and provide too little, too late for emergencies.

The Administration, in the name of efficiency and flexibility, is proposing to use up to 25% of the Title II budget for the local purchase of commodities during emergencies. Let me very clearly state our position. CRS supports the Administration's request for greater flexibility through local purchase. Let me add that this proposal would be even stronger if it included local development purchase for developmental, non-emergency programs.

In the media, PVOs have been unfairly portrayed as being opposed to the local purchase of food aid commodities. The subtext, when it is not stated outright, is that we're simply protecting our bottom lines. But the fact is, many PVOs that distribute U.S. food aid also buy food locally when that is the most responsible and appropriate thing to do. Between 2000 and 2005, Catholic Relief Services carried out more than 50 local purchases in 10 countries for commodities. They were valued at nearly \$7 million, most of that using our own private funds.

However, the fact remains that local purchase is not a panacea. We simply cannot buy all the food we need to feed hungry people in the countries we serve. There are times when local purchase is not feasible because there simply isn't enough food available locally. Sometimes the food available locally is not of high-enough quality. Sometimes such a large purchase of local food would distort the market and drive up food prices. This turns families who were just getting by into more food aid recipients. At times like these, we must have the ability to import food from elsewhere.

There are other ways we can use our food aid dollars more efficiently. We can ensure that the burden of emergency spending does not divert resources from non-emergency development Title II programs. One way to do that more effectively is to use the Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust. We would like to see the Farm Bill mandate that once Title II resources have been drawn down, additional funds would automatically come from the Emerson Trust, rather than from developmental food aid resources.

In other words, developmental food aid would be placed in a "safe box." We also favor a mechanism to automatically replenish the Trust if tapped for emergencies. The Emerson Trust, with modest changes, can offer a much needed buffer for developmental Title II programs. It can provide a more effective mechanism for addressing extraordinary emergency needs.

In conclusion, these developmental programs funded by Food for Peace have a profound effect on the lives of children and families. These vulnerable people are often affected in ways we don't discern immediately. These programs feed upwards of 70 million people a year. Many of these are children. Thanks to these programs they have the potential to build a better future for their families, their communities and their nations.

A few years ago, my colleagues were attending an official state function in Burkina Faso. The Minister of Education told them that he and most of his colleagues benefited from school feeding programs. These food programs enabled them to get an education and the nutrition they needed. And for every one of those government officials, there are thousands of doctors, teachers and farmers who can tell similar stories about the impact Food for Peace had on their lives.

Food aid programs will allow a healthy and educated generation to be ready to take on the work of this century. They will meet the global economy and move forward. We have seen millions of people lift themselves out of poverty in Asia, and they continue to do so. In Africa and elsewhere, there needs to be this investment in people. We have it within our power to do it – and future generations won't be burdened by the puzzle of trying to figure out why we didn't.

A young farmer who was raised in fields not too far from here in Abilene, Kansas grew up to become the 34th President of the United States. Dwight David Eisenhower said, "Food can be a powerful instrument for all the free world in building a durable peace."

Ladies and gentlemen, we can be the peacemakers of this new millennium.

Thank you.